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THE PLACE OF JESUS
IN MODERN RELIGION

I earnestly beseech all lovers of truth, not to cry out that the Church is thrown into confusion by that freedom of discussion and inquiry which is granted to the schools, and ought certainly to be refused to no believer, since we are ordered *to prove all things*, and since the daily progress of the light of truth is productive far less of disturbance to the Church, than of illumination and edification.—JOHN MILTON.

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Christ

THE PLACE OF JESUS IN MODERN RELIGION

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

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PREFACE

THE essays in this volume were issued in the New Series of Unitarian Tracts (Nos. 69-79), and Leaflet No. 14. They are published in this more permanent form, because several readers have expressed a wish to possess them, and in the hope that the book may, in these days of Progressive Theology Leagues, prove helpful to religious inquirers.

'The Place of Jesus in Modern Religion' was originally delivered as a lecture in Scotland by the late Rev. R. A. Armstrong. 'Christianity as Christ preached it,' by the late Rev. Dr. Brooke Herford, 'Salvation by Character,' by the Rev. Dr. C. G. Ames, 'Moral and Physical Evil,' by the late Henry Jeffery, 'The Problem of Evil,' by the late Rev. George St. Clair, are reprints of tracts which have had a very large circulation.

'The Christmas Birth-Poem,' by the Rev. W. C. Gannett, of Rochester, U.S.A., is reprinted from a tract issued by the American Unitarian Association; 'What Unitarians have done for

the People,' by the Rev. J. E. Manning, was delivered as a lecture in Manchester and Dundee ; 'Milton and Religious Freedom,' by the Rev. W. G. Tarrant, was prepared in celebration of the tercentenary of the poet's birth ; 'Broken Idols,' by the Rev. R. B. Drummond, was preached by him on the occasion of his jubilee as minister at Edinburgh ; 'The Prophets as Social Reformers,' by the Rev. Dr. Henry P. Smith, was delivered as an address at the opening of the Theological School at Meadville, U.S.A. ; 'God, Man, and the Universe,' by the Rev. Charles Travers, was specially prepared for the New Series of Tracts ; 'The Books of the Bible Dated,' by the editor of this volume, was prepared for those who desired a simple modern statement of the chronology of the books of the Bible.

W. C. B.

London, 29 *March*, 1909.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I The Place of <u>Jesus</u> in Modern Religion	i
By R. A. ARMSTRONG, B.A.	
II <u>Christianity</u> as Christ preached it	33
By BROOKE HERFORD, D.D.	
III The Christmas Birth-Poem	53
By WILLIAM C. GANNETT	
IV What <u>Unitarians</u> have done	77
By J. E. MANNING, M.A.	
V <u>Milton</u> and Religious Freedom	101
By W. G. TARRANT, B.A.	
VI Broken Idols	129
By R. B. DRUMMOND, B.A.	
VII Salvation by <u>Character</u>	151
By C. GORDON AMES, D.D.	
VIII The Prophets as Social Reformers	177
By HENRY P. SMITH, D.D.	
IX God, Man, and the Universe	213
By CHARLES TRAVERS	
X Moral and Physical <u>Evil</u>	229
By HENRY JEFFERY	
XI The Problem of <u>Evil</u>	255
By GEORGE ST. CLAIR, F.G.S.	
XII The Books of the Bible Dated	287
By W. COPELAND BOWIE	

Christ's

Ours is no age when religion can forsake the broad way of life. In the public street must she journey on, open her shop in the crowded square, and teach men by deeds, more eloquent than her lips. Hers is not now the voice that is to cry in the wilderness, but in the public haunts of men must she call them to make straight their ways.
—THEODORE PARKER.

THE PLACE OF JESUS IN MODERN RELIGION*

LET me tell you, at the outset, that looking back to my student days and through the space of years that intervenes, I find in my own mind a gradual yet sure and steady change in my conceptions both of Jesus of Nazareth and of those antique and hoary documents which give us the story of his life and word. And this slow change is in part derived from the conditions of the whole world of religious thought around me during the last quarter of a century, in part from my own specific thought and study. Most certainly neither the evangelical narratives nor Jesus Christ himself have lost in interest for me ; but the books stand in my thought in less

* Lecture by the late Rev. R. A. Armstrong, delivered February, 1890.

isolation from other books than they did ; and Jesus stands in less isolation from other men.

To take the Gospels first ; I was not brought up even as a boy to believe in the plenary inspiration of Scripture. My father, who had once held orders in the Established Church of Ireland, had broadened and deepened with study, and had abjured his allegiance to the Prayer Book, and avowed himself a Unitarian—a Unitarian, as Unitarians were at that day, of the school of Channing. But Unitarianism in those days was hardly the far-searching mode of thought which it is for the most part now. And though I was never taught the ordinary doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture, I certainly went to college thirty years ago with notions that came to much the same thing practically. I did not doubt that the four Christian Gospels were written by the four men whose names they bear, and written as they stand to-day. I did not doubt the perfect genuineness of their witness. I did not question either the birth-stories which open the first and

third of these famous books, or the resurrection-stories which close the record of all four. I supposed that Jesus had done all that the record said that he had done; and spoken all that the record said that he had spoken; and as for any marked distinction between the Fourth Gospel and the other three, of such, so far as I remember, I was quite unconscious.

And after the years of college training, not through any deficiency in my teachers, but through my own unpreparedness, I had made no very great progress from that standpoint. I had concluded that the birth-stories were no part of the original Gospels. I was aware of difficulties in harmonizing the narratives of the resurrection—knew that in Mark the original record ended without any distinct witness to the resurrection whatever; yet held that the resurrection itself—a visible resurrection before the eyes of men—was sufficiently proved by other considerations. I knew, too, now that the Fourth Gospel was of a character altogether different from the three Synoptics. But as for the three

Synoptics themselves, I saw no serious divergency in their witness; and I still thought that a very good case could be made out for the claim of the Apostle John to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. The belief in miracle generally was gradually fading out of my mind; but I was far indeed from realizing all that that erasure carried with it.

I find that I am now compelled to recognize, as controlling elements in all four Gospels, tendencies, prejudices, desires in their writers, which, unconsciously or consciously, shape their witness and modify their presentations in every incident from first to last. I find the Fourth Gospel breathing a religious philosophy beautiful and spiritual to a marvel, yet, as history and biography, quite untrustworthy—figuring a Christ, the Divine Word, who is vastly different from the Jesus Messiah of the other three. I am forced to conclude that the wonderful discourses here recorded, no less than the whole pattern of the biography itself, are the free elaboration of an unknown Christian mystic writ-

ing at least a century after the dark scene of Calvary. And then turning to the other three, although, as compared to the last of our Gospels, they stand together, I find them penetrated and permeated with disagreements and irreconcilabilities among themselves ; and I perceive, moreover, that it is impossible to set any one of them down as the personal production of a single author, that they have grown and changed, and changed again and grown, under the hands of successive collectors and revisers and editors till at last they crystallized in their present form. The Gospel of Mark I find the oldest, the main part of it possibly written down as early as the year 70 of our era, and including within it the notes of one Mark on the recollections of the Apostle Peter, but very much revised and coloured afterwards, and, as we have seen, the detailed account of the resurrection no part whatever of the original Gospel even in its completed form. And I find Luke next, but certainly not earlier than the year 80 of our era—likely enough, much later still—and with

ideas derived from the Apostle Paul worked in freely to the incidents of the life of Jesus, and to his speech. And later again—perhaps by a whole generation or more—I find what stands the first of our Gospels—containing as its nucleus indeed certain ‘Words’ of Jesus collected by the Apostle Matthew—but so freely worked over and shaped and coloured by varied fancy and imagination, that it has to be used more cautiously, perhaps, than any other Gospel—in the very midst of the Sermon on the Mount, ascribing to Jesus a declaration of the perpetuity of every jot and tittle of the Jewish law, which was as remote from his mind as from Paul’s, representing the Master as holding the Church principles which never came into being till well on in the second century, and moving among a Church organization of which neither he nor his immediate followers ever dreamt, and colouring and arranging the incidents of his career on the principle that fulfilment must be found in them for numberless arbitrarily selected passages in the old Hebrew writings, arbitrarily assumed to be

predictions concerning the Messiah. I find, again, that, while in Mark there still linger traces of the natural humanity of Jesus, with its gradual growth, its limitations, its ignorances, in Luke, and still more in Matthew, these human traits have given way to representations of a supernatural power and a divine appointment as complete at the outset as at the end—that while in Mark the conception of his own Messiahship breaks on the mind of the Good Teacher only towards the close, in Matthew it is proclaimed with accompaniment of celestial marvel at the opening of the story, that while in Mark it is clear that his missionary labours were bounded by modest conceptions, in Luke he already hints, by the mission of the seventy, the bringing of all the seventy nations of the world to his discipleship. And so I know, as I read my Gospels now, that at every step I must beware lest I be misled, and that if here and there I can seize a word or deed which I can be quite sure is the actual word or deed of Jesus of Nazareth himself, that is as much as I can hope to do.

And if the revolution of the years has brought with it this wondrous change in my conceptions of the canonical records of the Founder of Christianity, assuredly it has transmuted no less powerfully my conception of the great Hero about whose mighty personality the records have been gathered. I have told you that I was bred a Unitarian. I was never taught that Jesus Christ was God. But none the less a supernatural halo seemed to shine about the head of this great being. I did not doubt his miracles. I did not doubt the absoluteness of his character. I did not doubt that he held a divine commission such as none other has ever held—that a kind of spiritual certainty possessed him, through the immediate gift of God, which was given to no other son of man. I did not believe him other than man—but I did not realize, as I realize now, all the limitations involved in this conception of pure humanity.

But now I think that, under the tutelage of time and the stress of thought, I have realized all that it means to say that Jesus

was a man. I seem to see him rising into consciousness out of the dim past in which he was not, even as we, the men and women of to-day, have risen into consciousness. Through childhood the faculties clarified and gathered strength by slow degrees, the understanding fed itself on the incidents of life, the conscience slowly loomed out of darkness into light. Heredity and environment, soil and climate, tradition and history, wrought each its part in him as in other youths. He, too, wondered, pondered, conjectured, now got a clue, now lost it once again, with no other aid than the natural intellectual and moral powers of a finely wrought nature. And when the great thoughts of God stole into the young man's heart, he had no other guide than others have—a hint from the prophets of old, a gleam as of the divine presence shooting through his soul, vast, vague emotions stirring in him which seemed to be laden with messages of a heavenly love, the strange, sweet delight which passes over the conscience when a man has done well, the haunting sense of shame which darkens

a man's spirit when he knows that he has been faithless to the highest. I see now what it means that Jesus was a *man*: how it means that he had no other guarantee for the truth of the beautiful thoughts about God, and the worth of the emotions that stole over him when God seemed present, than you and I have—the guarantee that consists in trust in the best and purest that enters into our minds under the silent ruling of the Holy Spirit. And I seem to see Jesus, as a man sheerly and solely, with the great ideal slowly dawning on his consciousness, till the light thereof flooded his being, and it came to him that he must give his life to preaching the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, and, doubtless not without his mistakes, he went forth and toiled in the splendid self-forgetful enthusiasm of his faith and love, and after the first success, the iron entered into his soul as he more and more perceived that he could not take the kingdom of God by storm, and that the ignorances and bigotries and passions and hatreds of men would surely enmesh him, and at last, like

many a noble martyr before and since—yet with a sweeter spirit, I am prone to think, than any other of them all—in the great dignity of a divine purpose, he went uncomplaining to his death, and passed out again into the unseen.

And let me tell you, strange as it may appear—even paradoxical perhaps—that just in proportion as the supernatural, the superhuman, has faded away out of my thought of Jesus, and he has become in my thought simple, natural, unmiraculous, largely subject to heredity and environment like all of us, human in his hopes and fears, human in his efforts and no doubt his errors, human in his faith and trust, human in his disappointments and in his final seeming failure—so much the more my heart has clung to him, the more he has drawn my love and veneration, the more I have longed to be like him, the more I have trusted what he has to tell me of the Father and his love, the more he has become a real and living influence in my life, a power capable of touching me to holier mood and to braver effort. For

human sympathy is the mightiest of all the powers by which God teaches us and wins us ; and the brotherhood, the human fellowship, of Jesus, has in it a redeeming power transcending that of ecclesiastical sacraments or Augustinian creeds.

Yet we are bound, as truthful men, not to let a mere pious and poetic imagination run away with us even in reconstructing this absolutely human Jesus from the Gospel records. We are bound to ask, in the most critical spirit, how much and just what we really can know of him as an historical personage. We are bound, though hero-worship be good, not to indulge our hero-worship at the expense of truth ; and vague, emotional talk about Jesus, not founded on careful weighing of literary and historical evidence as to who and what he was, is sure in the long run to make for hypocrisy in religion and unreality in the profession of our faith.

Out of the Gospels, then, as modern criticism leaves them, torn, lacerated, scarred, pounded, cut up fine, what real historic Jesus can we build up ?

A truly scientific and historic criticism establishes certain facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth, and even certain of his utterances, with a firmness which no other mode of treatment could afford to them.

In the first place, there are scattered through the Gospels sundry sayings so epigrammatic in form and force that we cannot think of them as the product of the washings and wearings of the waves of tradition. They are the solid granite blocks which have resisted the lavings of the waters of time, and stand out to-day in their rugged integrity as they were first cast upon the soil. Of such pre-eminently are—‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath’; ‘A city set on a hill cannot be hid’; ‘Ye cannot serve God and mammon’; ‘Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you’; ‘Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?’ ‘Behold my mother and my brethren.’ These and the like are phrases that would stick in the memory—once uttered, never to be forgotten. And to these, for my

part, I should incline to add at any rate several of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount in their simplest forms: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'; 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness'; 'Blessed are the merciful'; 'Blessed are the pure in heart.'

But safer perhaps still than these epigrammatic individual phrases are other whole classes of utterances, the authenticity of which comes out only the more boldly by the rigour of critical investigation. We have acknowledged that prejudices of many kinds on the part of the writers have coloured or distorted the reports of the words or deeds of Jesus. What then of words and deeds still firmly embedded in the record which cut clean against those very prejudices themselves? The more you allow for the modifying force of prepossession in the writers, the more significant become those passages which retain their place in the record in the teeth of prepossession. If a Gospel editor shows throughout that he regards Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, and his kingdom as a

kingdom to be set out with Jewish paraphernalia, then if, in the midst of all that, we find him ascribing to Jesus descriptions of the kingdom which are without a trace of that narrow preconception, the inference is overwhelming that here he is reporting the actual thing which Jesus said; that the power of the Master's word has been too great for the distorting force of the reporter's prepossession. And broadly we may lay it down that all those elements in the Synoptical Gospels which are of a spiritual quality transcending the environment, the media, through which they come down to us can emanate from no other source than the great Master Soul himself who often so mournfully complained that he spoke to men who having ears heard not, neither understood.

Thus all the eschatological passages which make Jesus speak of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of glory, and in like manner passages which predict his crucifixion and resurrection, are of the most doubtful authenticity. They may so very easily be the accretions crystallizing in the

imagination of his successors around the nucleus of the slightest and lightest utterances. But passages burning with a spiritual faith, soaring above all Judaic limitations, breaking away from every traditional religious conception, touching the universal and the absolute in the spiritual world—these can be explained by no prejudices among hearers or evangelists, by no national prepossessions, by no traditional conceptions; the Master Soul must stand behind them, or their glowing words could never have been forged. And under this head we may safely gather the chief of the Beatitudes, a score of other episodes in the Sermon on the Mount, the great bulk of the immortal parables, the incomparable scene in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The whole ideal which in its height and compass gives these Gospels their pre-eminent place in the spiritual literature of the world is incapable of explanation by the preconceptions, the traditional modes of thought of the men who stood around Jesus of Nazareth and heard his words—incapable of explanation by the tend-

encies, the *ex parte* views of history, of that later generation of men who moulded the Gospels to their present form. The whole force of the unspirituality both of hearers and recorders would tell towards the despiritualization of that ideal, its repression under national or ecclesiastical forms consonant with their preconceptions or their own personal ideals. And therefore that spiritual ideal can only have got lodged in the Gospels at all because it was actually put forth by Jesus himself, and put forth with a vigour sufficient to resist the forces of repression. We may take the spiritual ideal of the Gospels at its highest level, and lay it down, without fear of any critical assault, that the actual gospel enunciated by Jesus was at the least as spiritual as that.

And thus wherever his speech seems to soar away from all local and tribal, all temporary and traditional constraint, we know that we come in touch with the real historic Man Jesus. Particular phrases may have been modified. They may have been gathered up into contexts to which

they did not originally belong ; and the very noblest of his teachings are indeed fitted into different contexts by the several evangelists. Commentary may be hung on them which is no part of his authentic utterance. But we are secure in our assurance that here we grasp the essence of what he had to teach—the immortal inspiration which has defied essential modification. That which is permanent, not transient, universal, not local, absolute, not relative, comes to us straight from the mighty heart of the Nazarene. And when we read the glorious parable of the Prodigal, the assurance that they shall see God who are pure in heart, the declaration that the kingdom of God is within, the proclamation that he who would save his life shall lose it, while he who willingly loses it shall save it, the wonderful adjuration, ‘ Except ye be turned round, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven,’ the supreme summing up of all the teaching, ‘ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy

strength ; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself ; on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets ' ; then we know that the word of him whose name is counted sacred by all the millions of Christendom is actually breaking on our ears and stirring our hearts within us.

The full force of the argument for the absolute authenticity of this element in the Gospels can never be appreciated till we realize the vivid contrast in which such teaching stands to all that was current either in Jewish or in Pagan society at the moment when Jesus stepped forth from the Nazarene home and opened his lips to teach. To us these sayings are so familiar, so well worn, that they have lost the sharpness of their edge. But to the men among whom they first were uttered they were of a new and wonderful spirit, exhibiting the moral and spiritual nature of man, and the divine love of God, as never had they been exhibited before.

And behind the particular utterances, behind the general drift of the teaching, we are critically justified in recognizing

a figure unique in moral integrity and spiritual grace, a being of a benignity and a dignity, and withal a commanding manliness, to which it would be hard to find a parallel in all the stores of history. We instinctively feel that the man who said these things, who conceived these things, also lived these things. We perceive that they could not have come up in his mind, and glowed in his heart, unless his daily living had been on the high and serene level of the truths which he declared. And while he convinces our minds by his words, still more does he engage our affections ; for, in spite of all their shaping and colouring by local and temporary conceptions, the records have somehow caught the personality of their hero with a marvellously life-like truth. And while we freely admit that the song of herald-angels and the midnight homage of the shepherds are but the coruscations of myth, that the stilling of the stormy waters and the gleaming sheen on the Mount of Transfiguration are but the materialization of the spiritual impression made by the man on the folk

among whom he moved, yet we feel also that just those types of legend could never have been precipitated about the person of any save one who had made strange and holy conquest of the hearts of the men who hung upon his word or heard the report of him in the early days after he had passed away. It is no fancy, no whim, no sentimentality that even to this day gives the person of Jesus so strong a hold on the affection and reverence of men of every creed; it is the actual electric energy of a mighty personality sending its current down the centuries and across the world.

The more we free ourselves from conventional modes of contemplating this Teacher, about whose mighty name so many wars of creed have raged, the deeper will be the interest of investigating his personality and his career as a problem in history and a study of character. And whether Keim or Schenkel, or Rénan or Hooykaas, or some other, seem to us to have penetrated most nearly through the haze of myth to the historic truth, and to

have drawn his picture most faithfully, none for whom greatness of soul, and beauty of disposition, and grandeur of achievement have engaging power will ever fail to bow the head before him with an awe that is tempered with love, with a love that is chastened with awe.

But it is one thing greatly to admire, greatly to revere ; it is another thing to constitute the object of that reverence a corner-stone in one's *religion*. What is the place of Jesus of Nazareth in modern religion ? Religion is a solemn word, meaning that which binds one to goodness or to God. Does the critical investigation which affords footing for our reverence for Jesus afford to him the right to dominate our religious faith and our religious life ? Here too the supreme obligation of truthfulness forbids us to run into conventional phraseology unless it turn out that such phraseology legitimates itself in the face of criticism.

All the greatness which through the considerations already set forth we have been led to ascribe to Jesus of Nazareth is

without any other guarantee than that his teaching appeals to our inward sense of the true and good, meets the response of our conscience and our spiritual nature. It is then our conscience and our spiritual nature that guarantee for us the truth and goodness of his teaching, not he that legitimates the teaching of our conscience and spiritual nature. He teaches that God is our Father. Our own religious experience confirms the doctrine. But it is not his word that proves the inward witness, but it is the inward witness that proves his word ; and that even though for multitudes it may have been his word that first quickened the inward witness to articulate life. Neither Jesus nor any other, philosopher or prophet, has any other authority over our belief than that authority which belongs to him who stirs the fountains of our own inward life and wakens us to the touch of God upon our souls. And where he or any other fails to wake a response in our own conscience, there his authority for us forthwith ceases. When Jesus says to me, Except thou be

converted and become as a little child, thou canst not enter the kingdom of heaven, then the spirit in me springs forward in response, and his word has authority with me, because it touches me into consciousness of a truth which I feel to be written on my soul by God, a truth which the daily experience of lengthening years vivifies and confirms. But if you could absolutely prove to me that Jesus had taught that God consumes recreant souls for ever in the flames of hell, there he would have no authority whatever over my belief, because the doctrine contravenes my judgment, repels my conscience, offends and wounds my reverence for the heavenly Father. And in like manner the authority of Jesus, as of any other teacher, to prescribe my conduct is limited to the case in which the conduct he prescribes accords with the dictate of my conscience. If I deem it wrong to hate my father and my mother, no word of his could ever make it right. And least of all has Jesus any compulsory authority over my affections. Affection cannot live except in freedom.

Perfect liberty is the law of its being. And if there be any who through what seems to us some warp of judgment or some twist of consciousness does not find himself attracted powerfully by the personality of the Man of Nazareth, admires Socrates more, loves Marcus Aurelius better, or in some friend or teacher now moving and speaking on the earth finds that which draws his affection and his veneration to the exclusion of one who lived so long ago and so far away—why, we have no shadow of right to blame him, or to deem ourselves more righteous than he, because our affections are moved as his are not. To love Jesus is not a religious duty; though if we are indeed moved to the love of him, it cannot fail to be a purifying and hallowing influence upon our spirits.

I decline, then, to accord to Jesus of Nazareth, or to the literary documents which have been the ark of his name and fame down the stream of the centuries, any supernatural authority over my belief, my conduct, or my emotions. In that sense he holds no place in my religion. But

none the less do I recognize in him a powerful and legitimate religious influence even in these modern times ; and predict for him the like influence over the minds and hearts and lives of men for many an age to come.

For, so far as my reading goes, he saw with the piercing insight of an incomparable religious genius certain fundamental spiritual truths which none other had ever so clearly and so vividly discerned—truths which, when we take them into our spiritual understanding, shine always more and more luminously under the test of the actual experience of the religious life. Take three of his recorded sayings which I have already claimed as among his adequately attested utterances.

The first shall be, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ The philosophers of the world are for ever straining the resources of dialectic to find proof of the reality of God ; and ever to all their syllogisms there comes the challenge of new and subtler doubts ; and Agnosticism, from Democritus to Huxley,

still shakes its head, and repeats the olden burden, 'We can never know.' Then in the sacred moments of our deeper life, the rhythm of the Nazarene's great saying sings itself in the silent spirit ; and though the brain be very weary, the heart is renewed with the vigour of youth, and vibrates to the truth of its own sensitive contact with the Divine, and the haunting, speculative doubt fades out, and the very touch of the living God is felt upon the soul. The time may come, alas ! when temptation hems you in, and the worldly motive, the lustful desire conquers you, and lo ! you look into your heart, and because the mirror is stained, the image of God is blotted out. But you brace yourself to the fight again, beat back the low ambition or the debasing lust, shake yourself free from its damning power, make clean and sweet and pure your life once more ; and gazing once more into the inward mirror, behold again the light of the countenance of God. Then you know that, however philosophy and philosophy may strive together, that is true which the Galilean said :

the pure in heart are blessed, for the pure in heart see God.

Again, that other maxim, about becoming as little children—it cuts clean against all ordinary scientific theory. For the one thing we are taught to do is to put away the childish mind, and strive to think the reasoned thoughts of men. But experience of life teaches us all how much there is in the lives of grown men to drag them down from the serene level of religious peace, how struggle and ambition and the ardour to get on are apt to deaden freshness of feeling, and to mar and maim the inward man; and if we ponder these things, we grow to understand how only by turning back from allowing to these tempers the dominant place, and by giving the first to the pure affections and the simple reverence which sway a child can we enter on that calm, sweet, strong, happy life which is what Jesus meant by the kingdom of heaven.

Or lastly, take that paradox about striving to save your life, yet losing it, willingly losing it, yet saving it after all. To the

man of the world sheer folly and fanaticism. To any ordinary philosopher a very unreasonable distortion of cause and consequence. All through the other spheres of life the way to get a thing is to strive for it. That is the way with wealth, with power, with fame, with learning. Toil for them ceaselessly through the years, and the chances are you will obtain them. But not so with happiness, with the satisfaction of the heart. John Stuart Mill made the great discovery in early manhood—the discovery which cut clean against all theory—that it is only when you forget to strive for happiness that it flows into your heart. In the practical realm it is the truth of truths. No reasoning could find it out. But the carpenter's son in Galilee knew it long ago, and, in epigram that can never die, declared it to those who clustered round to hear the words he spoke.

It is by luminous answers such as these to the problems that baffle the reason and distract the heart, and by the gracious personality as well, with its winning power over the affections and the reverence of

earnest men, that Jesus of Nazareth holds his place to-day foremost among the makers of rational religion, pre-eminent among the leaders of men into the eternal truth of God.

And two points of vantage let me claim for Unitarianism over the current orthodoxies embodied in the confessions of the vast majority of Christian Churches. If Jesus of Nazareth was God, then the elevation of his moral and spiritual character may command our worship, but it seems but a mockery to talk to us of imitation. Who are we, with all this human weakness unalloyed, with desire and passion and the spirit of sloth and cowardice for ever making war upon our hearts, that we should dream of walking in the steps or attaining to the temper of one who could fall back on all the resources of a Divine nature? The mingling of that God-essence with the human spirit surely gave him capacities for conquering temptation and achieving spiritual perfectness which are not open to the mere sons of men. But if he be in very truth a brother of our own, with no

other faculty than ours, born of the pure love of a wedded pair, child of God only as all are children of the heavenly Father, then he sets to all men the pattern and example of that to which pure humanity may by the grace of God attain ; and, as we realize his character, a new hope dawns for us, a new inspiration moves over our faltering will.

And then Unitarianism seems to me to have a special worth, inasmuch as it sends the worshipper straight to the heavenly Father with his prayer. The very heart of the gospel of the Master was the communion of the human spirit with God the Father, direct, immediate, spirit with spirit. And just in the measure in which the prayer of Christendom has been addressed to Christ, has it of necessity been withdrawn from him to whom alone it was that Christ himself, directed men to pray. The doctrine of the Deity of Christ has inevitably weakened the sense of the Fatherhood of God, the central message in the heart and on the lips of Jesus. Nay, even in the address of the soul

to the Father, the Churches have taught that that address must legitimize itself by the intervention of the Christ—that in his name, or for his sake, or through him only, are we to speak to God ; whereas the injunction comes to us clear and lucid from the prophet's mouth—' After this manner pray ye, " Our Father, which art in heaven." ' For my part—let me say it in reverence and sincerity—I am persuaded that, save the sin of men itself, nothing could so have grieved and wounded Jesus, in the ardour of his faith and love, as to foresee that through so many ages, so many myriads of those who took his name should worship him and offer him their prayers, whose whole being thrilled and throbbed with the great yearning to teach men to pray to that Father only to whom his own prayers rose with so supreme a trust and love.

CHRISTIANITY AS CHRIST PREACHED IT

WHO will show us any good? Where shall we find some real light on this great subject of Religion—some light in which our hearts may rest without being perpetually unsettled and adrift?

Am I mistaken in thinking that this is a craving widely felt at present? Men are puzzled and perplexed. Some would have us get rid of the perplexity by dismissing the whole subject. 'Even if there is any reality in religion,' they say, 'it is a reality that is utterly unknowable. Better leave it alone altogether, and not think about it!' But, in truth, the perplexity cannot be dismissed in that way. The world and its things visible and tangible are not all: they are not even all that man has to do with. The touch of sickness, the consciousness of sin, the

infinite deeps of affection, the tremulous mystery alike of life and death—all draw man from the outward to the inward, and reawaken the old sense of something above and beyond, and the old craving for some restful light of faith. No : the answer of letting the subject alone does not satisfy ; and yet neither does the old answer of the Churches. These still tell, in creed and catechism and statement, what it is that men should believe ; and, every now and then, they vote by large majorities that the old doctrines are unalterable ; and the various points seem well backed up by the old proof-texts, which sound clear and unmistakable ; yet still, when all is said, people are not satisfied. It is not that they have definitely rejected these doctrines, but that the doctrines do not touch their real doubts and questionings. They profess to give the formulae of God's nature, or detailed opinions about heaven and hell, to men who in their secret thoughts are wanting to be quite sure whether there is any God, or any life to come, at

all. And, if there is, they feel that the blessed thing would be to get back to these great realities, and rest in them, and not trouble themselves about all those matters of detail on which the Churches have been so divided.

Now, I want to set before you what I believe to be the true way out of these perplexities and doubts, the true way to this broader, simpler, more practical religion, and the way to feel that this is not merely something better, but that it is *true*—great, beautiful truth in which we may rest and live and pray, with happy and undoubting faith. That way I believe to be to look simply to what I have called ‘Christianity as Christ preached it’—to go back, as nearly as we can, through the narratives of the Gospels, to Christ himself as he went about among the people, preaching the great realities of God and goodness and immortality, and preaching them as ‘good tidings.’ See what he himself said, how he answered people’s questions, what he urged them to believe and to do, what it

was that he was constantly putting to them in his parables and beautiful deep sayings. If all the world's long reverence for Christ is not a mistake, let us look back to the original. You know that oft-quoted saying of Chillingworth's—'The Bible, and the Bible only, the religion of Protestants.' Well, that was a grand principle for its time ; and yet I think we may bring that idea to a brighter point still—'Christ, and Christ only, the special teacher for Christians.'

I do not mean this in any narrow sense. It does not exclude any light from other sources. Paul said that Christ was 'the foundation'—not all the building, not the whole of religious thought, nor the detailed answer for all religious questioning—but *the foundation*, the strong deep reality on which men may build, on which they may build up their living and their thinking, and be sure that they are not building on dreams or fancies. Get the light for all that building-up and feeling-out of religious thought wherever you can—from science, from philosophy, from

other religions : still, that does not alter the fact—on which all varieties of Christianity are based—that in Christ this great diffused light of religion came to its clearest brightness, to what men felt as a revelation. And my point is, that for that clearest brightness, we want to look to Christ, as nearly as we can get back to him, and to Christianity as Christ himself preached it.

Surely, this is a principle which should be accepted by all Christians. It is no new principle, nor any sectarian or exclusive one. The thought on which it rests is one which is owned by every church in Christendom. For there is not a church that does not own Christ as its great teacher ; there is not one that does not hold its beliefs under the idea that they are really the thought of Christ. John Calvin, in all his gloomiest doctrines of some being elected to be saved, and the rest of mankind being elected to be damned, sincerely believed that he was penetrating to Christ's deeper thought, and was only systematizing it with greater

clearness. Martin Luther attacked the papacy, because he believed that it was hiding Christ from men. John Wesley went forth to the hill-sides and by-ways, because he felt that Christianity wanted preaching more as Christ had preached it. And so Channing came out from the Orthodoxy of New England, because he believed that Orthodoxy was obscuring the simple teachings of Christ with certain things that the Master himself never taught. So that 'Christianity as Christ preached it,' is a great, broad principle that all ought to approve. But then how is it to be applied? This is where the trouble comes in. Many of those who quite believe, in the abstract, in holding for Christ's own truth, have been accustomed to fancy that his truth shines throughout the whole Bible alike. Now, on the contrary, I want to show you that the place to look for it is simply in the narratives of Christ's own life and teachings, and at most in a secondary degree, in the writings of his followers.

I do not think that there has ever

been a more misleading idea than that which has set Christians wandering round among all the books of the Bible as if they were all on one level of inspiration and authority, so that a verse from one part is as much to be received as a verse from another. It is such a complete misunderstanding of the Bible. The Bible is not one book : it is a whole library of books. Those books were written in distant ages, by many different writers ; and even those who still think that they were all inspired would hardly say that they were all equally inspired, and that the light of truth shines equally brightly and clearly in all parts. Who would say that the story of the old Canaanitish wars is as divine as the Sermon on the Mount ? When the writer of Ecclesiastes says that as the beast dieth, so dieth the man, ‘ so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast,’ is that to be as much to us as Christ’s word, ‘ In my Father’s house are many mansions ’ ? No : that whole idea which would put the Old Testament on a level with the New, and which holds that, if we believe

in Christ, we must believe in Samson and Jonah—that is all a blunder and a confusion. And even in the New Testament there are differences too. The light which was so bright in Christ was not quite so bright even in his apostles. Paul and Peter and John were holy men, men aglow with the spirit ; but they were not like Christ. As Emerson says, ‘ When God makes the prophet, he does not unmake the man.’ All Peter’s inspiration did not keep him so true, but that once Paul had to ‘ withstand him to his face.’ And when Paul says, ‘ Alexander the copper-smith did me much evil : the Lord reward him according to his works,’ that is not quite so high a spirit as that which said, ‘ Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.’ No : they preached the gospel with all their might ; and, still, if they had been asked whether they or their Master best understood the gospel and best taught it, can anyone doubt what their answer would have been ? And so the Epistles can never be put quite in the same place as Christ’s words in the

Gospels. Did you ever read what Luther wrote to Eck, who was defending the power of the Pope to define Christian truth? He said: 'It is certainly impudent in anyone to teach as the philosophy of Aristotle any doctrine which cannot be proved by his authority. You grant this. Well, then, all the more, it is the most impudent of all things to affirm in the Church, and among Christians, anything that Jesus Christ himself has not taught.' It is true that Luther himself did not keep to his own principle, but that is no new thing in the world. The principle is good, and it is exactly the principle Unitarians have ever pleaded for. 'What saith the Master?' Turn to the Gospels most of all. There you have the thought of Christ himself, at first hand. There is the very heart of Christianity. And I am persuaded that, if men would look at it in that way, it would be the most blessed thing for religion, and there would be no more talk of Christianity being in danger. For the differences of the sects (which have given the impression of everything

being uncertain) would sink into their minor place ; while the great thoughts of Christ would not only come out with a new simplicity, but would come to the human heart with the same divine assurance which gave them their power of old.

Here, then, is the true principle :— ‘ Christianity as Christ preached it.’ And now let us see something of its application. To begin with, it has to be applied negatively. There are some things which have to be cleared away. Indeed, I believe that a great deal of what still passes for Christianity, in the common setting forth of it, will have to be laid aside when tried by this test.

I listen with wonder to the things which are held up, all around us, as the essential truths of Christianity ; for they are, to a large extent, things of which Christ never spoke at all. Take, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity—three persons in one God. Just think of the stress that has been laid upon this throughout the Christian centuries ; men anathematizing each other, even slaying each other, not

only for not holding it, but even for holding it in some slightly different way from that which the Church, at this period or that, had settled. There is not so much stress laid upon it to-day; but almost all the Churches profess to hold it, and there is still a great deal of learning and subtlety spent upon it. It stands as one of the things which have to be defended and explained as part of Christianity. Yet how could this doctrine possibly have come to hold such a place, if men had only kept to Christ's own teachings? Why, where does he ever say anything about the Trinity? He not only does not say—as the Athanasian creed says—that it is to be believed, 'before all things,' but he never says that it is to be believed at all. He never touches such questions about the Divine nature. He *does* quote the ancient watchword of his people—'Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'¹ But there he stops. All that he tried to add to that ancient faith of his people in One Almighty God was,

¹ Mark xii. 29 (Revised Version).

not mysteries about his inner being, but more of tenderness, more of love, to help men to think of him not as a great, far-off King, but as the ever-present Spirit of life and love whom we should call 'Heavenly Father.'

Take the doctrine of Original Sin, or Total Depravity. You know the entire 'scheme of salvation,' as it is called, is built up upon the idea that the whole human race was ruined by Adam's fall, and that, since that, every human being has come into the world already sinful by nature and incapable of anything good. But where does Christ say anything about this? Why, here is the simple fact that among all the 'proof-texts,' as they used to be called, for this doctrine, there is not one single word of Christ's ever quoted. There is not a word from him to quote! Every word of his was against it—not against the idea of men being sinners, but certainly against the idea of their being born sinners and incapable of anything else. Indeed, the whole appeal of his gospel was to men weak and sinful,

but with some good still clinging to them, able to do better, and whom he was continually urging to do better. No: the doctrine of 'total depravity' is certainly no part of 'Christianity as Christ preached it.'

Or, take the doctrine of Endless Hell, about which there has been so much discussion of late years. I know that this has more to show for it in the apparent letter of Christ's teachings. There are many passages which, as we have been accustomed to read them in our old English version, have seemed to mean this. But some of these were strained renderings which the Revised Version has put right; and all of them are the language of figure and parable, never meant to be taken literally. What Christ did was to warn men of the terrible sorrow and woe of passing on wicked and hardened into that life to come that might be such a blessing and joy. But he never closed up all doors of hope after death. If he left all that further end of the subject in mystery, it was a mystery bounded by the Father's infinite love.

That doctrine of endless, hopeless hell was the strained exaggeration of after-times. Thank God, it is fast becoming no part of any thoughtful man's religion. I want men to see that it was no part of Christ's religion.

Or, take the doctrine of the Atonement, as it is commonly set forth: that God could not forgive without the full penalty of sin being paid, and that Christ therefore died on the cross as our substitute, and so paid our debt and bought us off, satisfying God's justice and enabling him to forgive. I know that many people, even in orthodox Churches, do not now hold this in that older way, as a mere substitution. I am glad of it; but that is how it is still preached by the immense majority. But could men ever have held such a shocking doctrine, if they had said to themselves, 'Let us see how Christ treated this matter'? No; for there is not a word of this in his teachings. There are some passages in the Epistles which look like it at first sight, though they really mean nothing of the kind, when

you look closely into them. But in Christ's own teachings there is not anything that even looks like it. Always, Christ represents the heavenly Father as simply requiring repentance, but real repentance, leading to better life. Only, he invites men to that repentance with such pictures of free fatherly love as made his words a gospel of hope and mercy and encouragement.

Now is not this a most striking thing ? These that I have named are called the 'peculiar doctrines of the gospel,' and yet Christ said nothing about them ! They are the very matters upon which the religious bodies most frequently preach, and yet they had no place in Christ's preaching. You know what is commonly called a 'Gospel Sermon.' It is one that begins with man's being ruined by the Fall ; goes on to show that God, because of his justice, could not forgive ; paints the hopeless state of man, unable to do anything to help himself ; then brings in the remedy of Christ's substitution ; and winds up with appealing to sinners not to work

out their own salvation, but simply to accept this ready-made salvation bought and paid for, for them. Nay, it is well if it does not even warn them against trying to do anything on their own part. That is what is called a 'Gospel Sermon.' But whose gospel? Did Christ ever preach anything like this? I cannot find it. Indeed, when I look at the kind of sermon Christ did preach, and how totally he left out everything of this kind, I sometimes fear that, if he came again, preaching only what he preached before, there is hardly a religious denomination that would admit him to its ministry or give him a ticket of membership to its communion.

But I do not want to speak merely of what Christ did not preach, but of what he did preach. I want to set forth once again, with all the earnestness and power I have, the simple gospel which Jesus Christ went about trying to persuade men to receive, and which he sealed at last with his blood—the gospel of happy, trustful love toward God, and practical righteousness among men. Surely, the very

heart of it all was Christ's sense of the fatherly love of God, and of the blessedness of living in his love as his trustful and faithful children. 'The kingdom of God'—that was his watchword: it came to him from the great national hope of his people, who had been long looking for some great outward change of deliverance and glory. He showed them that the kingdom of God was *at hand*, in their own hearts and lives, if they would only receive it; the world full of God—God in the beauty of the lily, and the care of the sparrow, in the good thoughts that come to the pure in heart, and the strength that upholds the weak and suffering. This present blessing, life in the love of God—this is the good tidings he goes about preaching; and by and by, when great multitudes come about him, he gives the first great proclamation of the new life in the 'Sermon on the Mount.' What is it all about? Blessings on the pure in heart, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers; exhortations to a higher righteousness than that of forms and ceremonies; brotherly

kindness, and charity, and patience, put in a new and more beautiful light ; encouragements to prayer ; and to quiet happy trust in the heavenly Father's love ; all coming to a point in that closing parable of the wise man who ' built his house upon the rock,' and the foolish man who ' built his house upon the sand.' That Sermon on the Mount was the great proclamation of his good tidings. It is the very charter of practical religion. It has stood ever since, and stands still at the head of the religious utterances of the world. But there is not a word in it of all those doctrines which have been most insisted on in the creeds and articles of the Churches.

But perhaps Christ unfolded something more than this simple gospel of God's love and man's duty in his subsequent preaching. Follow him in thought as he goes to and fro among the people, with his great yearning love for them in his heart : often not knowing in the morning where he would lay his head at night ; gathering the people together, answering

their doubts, rebuking their sins, pointing their faith to God, and trying to persuade them to believe in this present blessedness of the kingdom of God in the heart. But no: his teachings are everywhere the same. Very little that could be called theology; nothing abstruse, no sharp lines of doctrinal definition. It is a few great thoughts and principles put in ever-new lights, pressed home in different ways. A great deal about God's fatherly love, little or nothing about believing just thus or so concerning him. A great deal about repentance, and bringing forth the practical 'fruits' of repentance, nothing about God's justice requiring any other satisfaction. A very great deal about loving one's fellow-creatures, and being just and kind and helpful. Sometimes stern warnings against selfishness and hypocrisy (the one class of whom Christ seemed to have most horror was the hypocrites); warnings reaching on into the life beyond, and sometimes, when he had to speak to hardened men, very stern and awful; but still, over all, the infinite fatherly love,

and the joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Oh, it is wonderful ! Such a bright light of religion, such a strong reassurance to man of its reality and certainty, but with no attempt at outlining or definition or minute mapping out of divine and eternal things ; just the great heavenly Father, the right heart turned toward him, the light of duty and helpfulness among men, and the great restful heaven for God's true children. This is Christianity as Christ preached it.

Have faith in God, and never mind trying to define his nature or his decrees. Strive against sin, and let alone the old attempts to explain just how it entered in. Follow Christ with loving reverence, even though you cannot settle all about his person. Look on hopefully to the great heavenly world, sure that even its woes and hells must work the loving purposes of God.

THE CHRISTMAS BIRTH-POEM

MANY people are asking to-day, Is the Christmas Birth-Story, as told in the Gospels, literally true? If not, why not? And if not true, how did it rise as a story and enshrine itself in the two Gospels? And why is it that those who do not think it is history love it so well?

The story lies there in the Gospels echoing with song, and all a-shine with miracle and angel-glow. There are two accounts, one in Matthew, the other in Luke. Save for the glitter of the Magi and their gifts and their travelling star, Matthew's story is sombre—a record of dismay, of tragedy, of hairbreadth escapes. Luke's is a smiling idyll, a 'pastoral symphony,' every incident joyous. They probably show what

many in the Jewish-Christian communities were coming to believe concerning the birth of Jesus some sixty or seventy years after his death, about the time when 'Matthew' and 'Luke' received their final forms. But the stories are so unlike, and some of the details so hard to dove-tail together, that it is probable that the two stories rising from a common source—the popular belief that, in some way or other, Jesus was at once 'Son of David' and 'Son of God'—developed along two independent lines of tradition. Joining the two accounts, however, we have the following series of wonderful events.

First, the birth miraculous of little John, the herald of the coming King (Luke i. 5-25, 57-80). Then an angel comes to Joseph and to Mary separately, to tell each one that the first-born child shall not be Joseph's child at all—it shall be Mary's only, born direct from the creative power of God; and that it shall be Israel's long-expected Saviour-King (Matt. i. 18-25; Luke i. 26-38).

Next, the betrothed lovers travel together from Nazareth to Bethlehem—a census requiring them to be registered in the city of David, Joseph's royal ancestor; and soon, one night, a band of singing angels startles some shepherds in the fields near by with the glad news that their 'Christ' is born; and the shepherds, hasting away to Bethlehem, find the babe lying in a manger (Luke ii. 8-20). A few days after, two aged saints in Jerusalem recognize the babe as he is brought into the temple, and praise God they have lived to see the 'Christ'; and one of them already seems to see afar his rejection and death (Luke ii. 21-38). Then 'wise men' from the east, signalled onward by a star, arrive at Jerusalem, bringing gifts for the little Christ-King; and the star travels in the sky to guide them (Matt. ii. 1-12). To make sure of killing this little King of Israel, old King Herod sends and slays all the young babes in Bethlehem. But Jesus escapes, because in dreams angels warn Joseph to flee with

his family to Egypt, and when to come back, and where to live in safety (Matt. ii. 13-23). So the angels in heaven rejoiced, and the wide east welcomed the Mighty Child, although a manger-cradle, and a shepherds' greeting, and an old man's blessing, and a threatening sword, were all that his own people had to offer him !

Now are these stories true ?

There is really little need of scholarship to answer this question. It is true that the events which, having no miracle in them, look most historical—the genealogies, the Bethlehem birthplace, the census, the slaughter of infants—true that these events must be referred to scholars for authentication ; and also true that each and all begin to dissolve as ‘facts’ as soon as the scholars do carefully examine them. But taking the story in the large, five plain, strong facts and parallels appear, which anyone with little pains can verify, and these suffice as basis for common-sense judgment.

Only two Gospels contain the story.

Neither Mark, the earliest Gospel, nor John, the latest, mentions this stupendous miracle of Virgin-Birth. In the two Gospels which do record it, it is found only in the opening chapters; nowhere else is it even alluded to; not a hint of it is given by Jesus himself, or by his family, disciples, friends, or foes. There is no reference to it in Acts, that book so full of formal pleas for Jesus' claims. And no reference to it in the whole circuit of Epistles, though Paul in his Epistles, and others in Epistles accredited to Paul, argue hard to establish and glorify Jesus as Lord. Strange, is it not, such paucity of record and allusion, if the story be true? Strange, also, that what allusions there are to the parentage of Jesus—and there are several—all point away from any miracle and towards common birth.

Of the two Gospels that tell the stories, each one also gives a human genealogy of Jesus. These two genealogies differ widely and irreconcilably, but they both trace his lineage through Joseph to King

David. The long-promised national Messiah, whenever he should come, was to be of David's blood. This was the most important point of the many Old Testament prophecies interpreted as authenticating the Messiahship. According to the old popular belief, then, Jesus must be the 'Son of David,' any way; according to the new-dawning popular belief, he must also, in some literal sense, be 'Son of God.' The genealogies vouched for the one ancestry, the story of the Virgin-Birth for the other; and, irreconcilable as the two vouchers are, the honest Gospels naively give them both. But what shall *we* say to them?

It is easy to account for half a dozen of the Birth-Story items by tracing them to their probable sources in such Old Testament passages as I have just alluded to. The Gospels themselves name these sources. 'Fulfilment of prophecy' the process is called, and great reliance was placed on it as evidence by the Jews in old time, and by many Christians still. In most cases some

prophet's actual meaning is twisted all awry to reach the significance desired. They are not instances of prophecy fulfilled, but of common analogy, and often very forced analogy at that. The old passage sometimes even generates the later incident; and this is very probably the origin of some of our Birth-Story incidents. A trick of intellectual obliquity all this, but all in perfect honesty, again. It is the same act of 'imagination' which gives Swedenborg, or Mrs. Eddy, or any Second Adventist interpreter of Daniel, their several 'Keys to Scripture.' Are they dishonest? No, but very credulous over their own ingenuities.

To illustrate this by one important instance. The Greek translators of the Old Testament inadvertently translated a Hebrew word in Isaiah (vii. 14), which means a 'marriageable young woman,' by a word which means a 'virgin.' Hence arose a misunderstanding which rendered the use of the verse in Matthew i. 22-23 possible: 'Now all this was

done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us.' Moreover, this passage in Isaiah, who lived some seven hundred and fifty years B.C., refers to an event expressly said by him to be close at hand in his own time. And this mistranslation, mis-transferred across eight Hebrew centuries, and then wholly misinterpreted, contributed materially to the great misconception which has reigned through all these Christian centuries since.

Thinking over facts like these, however much we want our shining stories true, we can hardly help beginning to suspect that they may be stories of idealization rather than of history. And that thought is confirmed by watching, as we can, how quickly these Gospel stories grow longer and more wonderful. In books not admitted into the New Testament, but great favourites with Christians of the early centuries, and spuriously

fathered on apostles as the 'Gospel of James,' of 'Thomas,' and of others—in these so-called 'Apocryphal' books each separate birth-miracle of our Gospels blossoms out into a whole cluster of miracles. Some of these are pretty; some grotesque; some represent young Jesus as a very Puck of roguery. They are Christian folk-tales, showing how the popular imagination conceived that a God-child might be born and might behave. Current among the people in the second and third centuries, they kept on growing more abundant, coarser, wilder, well into the Middle Ages.

See what you think of some of these new Birth-Stories. Are they not pretty? Are they likely? The birthplace, we are told, was a dark cave, which Mary's entrance lights as with a sun. At the birth-instant everything in Nature stops and hushes, spell-bound—birds in the air with their wings outspread, labourers at their lunch with hands half-way lifted to their lips, goats at the spring with necks half-bent to drink. When the child

is born, the ox and ass, near by, kneel down and worship him. A voice is heard from the cradle, saying, ' Mary, I am Jesus, the Son of God ! ' The shepherds' names are told us. Those wise men from the east become three kings from three different quarters of the earth—Europe, Asia, and Africa. One is old and white-haired, one swarthy and in mid-life, one a ruddy, beardless youth—or else a negro, for the stories differ about him. Their ' star ' spoke to them, and moved two years before them on their way, they needing neither food nor drink for all that time. The story of the journey into Egypt is a diary of the cures that the baby wrought and the homage paid to him. Idols fall to the ground before him, lions and dragons kneel, robbers are converted on the spot, roses spring up in his path, palm-trees bend their branches to offer him their dates, fountains break out in the sand to quench his thirst. All these stories of the baby-god are told us in detail. And now the idealization spreads. His parents begin to catch

from their child the wonder-glow. Mother Mary's own birth is described as a miracle, and we hear much about her holy girlhood—how, when three years old, she was taken to the temple to be brought up, and on the third step of the altar the little maid 'danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her'; and how pretty she was with her light hair and hazel eyes; and how she made her own clothes; and then about her betrothal, when twelve years old, to the widower Joseph—a ceremony involving another pretty miracle. And at the other end of Mary's life we have an Arabian Nights' tale of her glorious ascent to heaven, with the story of Joseph's death-bed—this last as told by Jesus to his disciples.

Do we seek still further confirmation of the ease with which such Birth-Stories grow and halo the heads of holy ones? Remember, then, that Jesus is not the only wonder-born child of the Bible, though no one else is born so wondrously as he. Recall the cradle-miracles of

Isaac, Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist (Gen. xvii.-xviii. ; Judges xiii. ; I Sam. i. ; Luke i.). In other lands and other religions stories of wonder-birth are common about their heroes. The first few pages of the 'Light of Asia' tell of another Virgin Mother, with star-signs and angel-guards and dreams and grey-haired saint and bowing trees and springing flowers and gushing streams, and all the heavens and earth in jubilee over a little Saviour of the World, born in India some four or five hundred years before the Christ. They called him there the Buddha, or 'Enlightened One,' and his religion fills Central Asia as the religion of the Christ, the 'Anointed One,' fills Europe. You should read those pages in the 'Light of Asia.' The stories of the birth of Krishna, also, the lovable God of India, bear marked resemblance to those so dear to us. In the old Persian religion, Zoroaster, its founder, and Socioosh, the expected Saviour, are both described as virgin-born. In China the people glorify their emperors by tracing

back their family to such a miracle. In Greece and Rome, heroes like Hercules and Romulus, philosophers like Pythagoras and Plato, great conquerors like Alexander and Cæsar, were here and there accounted for by miracles of birth.

Our question was, Are the Birth-Stories in our Gospels true? Are we not ready now to judge? In the light of facts and parallels like these, what is the reasonable answer? Are all such Birth-Stories true? Or are the stories true in Jesus' case alone, while the rest are idealizations? Or are all alike the product of reverent imagination?

Surely, to common sense the last supposition seems the reasonable one. Unlikely stories need strong evidence; all these stories are unlikely stories; the best guaranteed among them are our Gospel stories, and we have seen how little evidence these, the best guaranteed, have to support them. On the other hand, all the stories seem psychologically alike; one source, the reverent imagination of the common people, amply

accounts for each and all. 'There is a Defoe in every age and race; it is the popular imagination'; but it is an honest and unconscious Defoe, never dreaming that his stories are not reality—his poetry, fact. From him arise the myth, the legend, the fairy-tale, the folklore—all, forms of poetry; but to the unconscious poet himself who makes them, science and history. Legends rise as unconsciously fictitious history—fancies grown around facts so closely that people think them real parts of the fact, like a vine grown around a tree till one can hardly tell what is vine and what is tree. The Buddha, the Krishna, the Cæsar stories we call, frankly, 'legends.' So, too, with those luxuriant birth-stories in the Apocryphal Gospels. And so should we call our shining Gospel stories, which give us the Christmas carols. They are legends; they are early Christian folk-tales. 'Bible fairy stories,' a little girl called them; and that is a pretty good name, suggestive of the truth.

And this is the growing recognition

to-day. Thousands to-day, and thousands more as each new Christmas comes, are reading these stories much as we read the old Greek legends of the hero-helper, Hercules, or old English legends of good King Arthur; not a bit more believingly; only more lovingly, many of us, because they have to do with Jesus. For their beauty, for their poetry, and as signs of ancient reverence felt for him in days more primitive and ignorant than ours, we are glad that they found their way into our Bible. And we are glad, too, that we no longer believe them.

‘No longer believe them.’ Let us count our losses, and what we have not lost, as we say this. We have lost the miraculous birth, the manger-cradle, the angels’ song, the shepherds’ quest, the wise men’s visit—lost these all as literal facts. What have we not lost? Not the Beatitudes; not the Parables; not his Sermon on the Mount; not his ‘Thy kingdom come, thy will be done’; not Gethsemane; not the Cross. Nothing of the spirit of Christmas, nothing of the

spirit of Christ. He said himself what that was: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised—to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.' Nothing of all this is lost. What have the Birth-Stories to do with things like these, O we of little faith? Nothing that ought to be done and might be done in his name, is lost to us. To right wrongs, to enact justice, to follow ideals, to deepen peace, to widen goodwill, to reconstruct the relations between rich and poor, to ennoble the attitude of so-called Christians towards the race to which he himself belonged, to change the shotted Armadas of war into burden-bearers of benevolence between the nations—all these lofty duties are still ours to do, and to do in his name as followers of him, if we so will.

Another thing—and friends in Orthodoxy should take comfort from this—

another thing the world does not lose by losing the Birth-Stories, and that is, faith in the 'Incarnation,' the visible coming of God in Christ. The Birth-Stories are nowise essential to that faith. Who are the great New Testament sources of the doctrine of the Incarnation? Paul and the writer of 'John'; and, to all appearance, Paul and the writer of 'John' knew absolutely nothing of those Birth-Stories! To judge by the spiritual trend of their teaching, it is not too much to say they would probably have disbelieved them. Can Christendom need them, then, so much as many anxious souls are fancying? 'John' is doubtless an idealized portrait, not real biography; but suppose that Jesus really said the words about himself and made the unique claims attributed to him in 'John,' they might all be true, were Matthew and Luke as completely destitute of Birth-Stories as Mark and John itself are: their truth or non-truth stands on wholly other grounds. Let these anxious ones take heart with Paul and

‘John,’ drop their physical story, believe in the things of the Spirit, and so mount to the higher reaches of their own glorious truth. I need not say that this more glorious height, the truth of universal Incarnation, of which the common doctrine is but the mere foot-hill, is independent of the carol stories in Matthew and Luke.

But the fact is, further still, that not even those Matthew and Luke stories are really ‘lost,’ that not a carol is really hushed, by ceasing to believe in the stories as literally true. When the children first find out who ‘Santa Claus’ is, for a little while they may hang their heads in disappointment. But soon the children like it all the better that the gifts do come from the father and the mother and have the home-love in them—and *still* they hang the stockings up, still play the Santa Claus, still keep ample mystery and surprise about the Christmas. So with the Christmas story in the Gospels : when we find out what it really is, at first we may be dismayed and dis-

appointed ; soon we like it even better that Jesus came into the world like any little brother ; but still, and even in the church, we love to read the story and sing the carols over, as Christmas Day comes round.

And, more, we enjoy the associations which have grown with time around the story. These Birth-Legends have played a great part in Christian history. They have made Nazareth and Bethlehem 'holy places' to the world. They have filled the churches with pictures, each separate incident being source to hundreds of pictures. The Madonna and Child is *the* great subject of Roman Catholic art, and Europe in the Renaissance centuries learnt to paint by trying to paint them. They have given plays to the theatre ; our modern drama grew out of the miracle and mystery plays of the Middle Ages, and no subject so popular for them as the Nativity themes. They have brightened winter with the gladdest, merriest, friendliest festival of the whole year's round. They

helped in the popular mind to shape and establish the central dogma of Christian theology. They throned in the Roman Catholic heavens a 'Mother of God'—a tenderer lover of men than all the three dim persons of the Trinity. The belief underlying all these associations is not ours; the joy in these products of the belief we share with the world that does, or did, believe.

And this leads to my last question. By what title do those, who do not share the belief that the Christmas story of the Gospels represents fact, love and use the story as their very own?

By right supreme of the human heart to poetry—to beautiful symbols of beautiful truth wherever fit symbols are found. In religion such symbols usually begin their being as 'beliefs'; and only in a second stage of their life, and perhaps when they are dying or dead as beliefs, do they become 'symbols.' But to this immortality they are predestined, if they are only beautiful enough. Language is full of conscious, is compact of un-

conscious, poetry having this origin. If born far back in time, we call such once-beliefs 'myths,' making free use of them as symbols, and no one misconceives us. Many a Bible once-belief has thus volatilized into poetry, and others are exhaling to-day ; the Genesis, Moses, Elijah stories furnish many examples. Eden, Ark, Covenant, the Wrestle with God, the Path through the Sea, the Law on Mount Sinai, the Pillar of Cloud, the Still Small Voice, the Chariot of Fire—give but a hint of the multitude.

Even so it is coming to be with the Gospel Birth-Story. Once to all Christians it was, still to most Christians it is, 'fact' ; to others, increasing in number, it has become but a beautiful poem. As a 'belief,' it is dying or dead ; as a 'poem,' it is immortal. We are not going to say 'I believe' to it, as they said in the ancient creed. In the ancient creed that was honestly said : it is not honest for such as we to say so to-day either in nursery, kindergarten, or church. Our children shall know what we mean by it,

just as they shall know what we mean by the other Christmas poem of Santa Claus; nor will they enjoy either poem the less for the knowing. What we mean by it; for poetry *means*, and invariably means truth truer, larger, more beautiful than the concrete prose that is always aspiring to become the poem. This is the case with the Gospel Birth-Story. Taken as poem, the truth in it vastly expands; for as poem, it has two meanings, and both of them beautiful.

It is the poem of the Mother and Child. Who can but love it for that? The mystery, the sanctity, the divinity in source and in advent of every child that cometh into the world—all this lies hinted in it. Mary is every mother. Our own dear home is the Bethlehem inn. Our nursery-cradle the manger. The angels rejoice with us in the advent, as well they may. Sympathy, greetings, gifts arrive, as they ought. Wise men bend in awe, and the mother ponders many things in her heart of glory and peril for the helpless life now lying on her

breast. Like the pictured Madonna on our wall, the poem hangs in our mind as symbol of that tender miracle that God is working every day in his homes the wide world over, through his millions of Marys and Josephs.

Still the angels sing on high,
Still the bearded men draw nigh,
Bringing worship with the morn,
When a little child is born ;
Baby-glory in the place,
Star-look on the mother's face,
Psalm within the mother's heart—
Christmas all in counterpart !

Blessings on the little child
In the cave far-off and wild !
For that nursery divine
Tells me well, O baby mine,
That *thou* art Emmanuel,
' God with us,' come here to dwell—
Come to say, ' Since time began,
Son of God is Son of Man ! '

Again, it is the poem of the Coming of the Spirit of Love on the earth. The little boy that lay on Mary's breast grew into the man who spoke the deepest secret of his being in the words, ' I came not to

be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give my life a ransom, for many ; and this, my secret, is the way, the truth, the life, for all men. Every one that would save his life shall lose it ; and every one willing to lose his life as I lose mine shall save it.' He lived this secret, and he died it. And his name, through the wonderful transfigurations of history, has become a symbol of that way of living and dying for others ; a symbol, therefore, of love supreme, of the Love at the heart of the universe. We call it the Christ-spirit. Diffused over the earth, it is the spirit of peace and goodwill among men ; and it brings the kingdom of God. But the Christmas poem in the Gospels is the story, told in a sweet kindergarten way, of the birth of the child whose living and dying have named that spirit. The Spirit itself is far more ancient than Jesus ; it made him to be ; it laid him in Mary's arms ; it lifted him to the cross ; it has throned him now as ideal in the heart of the world.

WHAT UNITARIANS HAVE DONE FOR THE PEOPLE

I WAS talking a short time ago to a friend who, like many others in the present day, has got into the habit of absenting himself from a place of worship ; and he gave as an excuse that he did not think he got any good from attending religious worship. ‘I think,’ said he, ‘that one man who produces something of practical use for mankind is doing more good than all the ministers and clergymen put together.’ ‘For example,’ he added, ‘the man who invented anæsthetics, that deaden pain under surgical operations, has conferred a greater boon upon the world than all the priests and ministers ever did.’

Now, I do not deny that the man who invented anæsthetics has conferred great benefit upon mankind ; but the assertion

that he has done for men more than all the ministers of religion put together is a sweeping assertion, easily made, but not so easily proved. When we consider all the benefits which religion and religious institutions under the direction of ministers of religion have produced, it would hardly seem worth while to argue the point. But I was struck with the fact that my friend, a Unitarian, should have chosen to illustrate his reason for abstention from worship by the mention of the discovery of anæsthetics, for it was Joseph Priestley, sometimes called the father of English Unitarianism, who discovered the most commonly used anæsthetic ; and if the discovery be, as indeed it is, an enormous boon to mankind, then Joseph Priestley, the minister of a Unitarian church, conferred that boon upon the world.

The use of nitrous oxide as a means of deadening pain dates from the beginning of last century, when Sir Humphry Davy, experimenting on the gas discovered some years previously by Priestley, suggested that it might be used as a useful anæsthe-

tic. Joseph Priestley was the pioneer in many things that have proved beneficial to the world. For the most part he did not benefit by his discoveries ; nor did he always know the enormous value of the discovery he had made—but he made the discovery, and the world was not slow to make use of his inventions. For example, he discovered a method of curing scurvy at sea ; and Captain Cook wanted him to accompany him on his second voyage to the southern seas. But on the Board of Longitude were several clergymen, and the idea that a Unitarian should sail on board His Majesty's ship *Resolution* was too monstrous to be entertained. He would prove a second Jonah, and probably the ship would go to the bottom. Whatever their sapient fears portended, Priestley was not allowed to go, and Captain Cook, adopting Priestley's suggestions, brought home his crew without a case of scurvy on board, and received public thanks for a feat which the sagacity of Priestley enabled him to perform.

Again, Joseph Priestley discovered a method by which 'fixed air,' as he called it, carbon dioxide, or carbonic acid gas, as we call it, could be forced into water, and so produce what he characterized as 'a pleasant acidulous taste.' He produced, he tells us, in a few minutes, 'a glass of exceedingly pleasant sparkling water, which could hardly be distinguished from very good Pyrmont, or rather seltzer water.' Joseph Priestley had, in fact, invented what are now called mineral waters—'a service,' says Professor Huxley, 'to naturally, and still more to artificially thirsty souls, which those whose parched throats and hot heads are cooled by many draughts of that beverage, cannot too gratefully acknowledge.' The use of aerated waters of every kind dates from Joseph Priestley. Seeing how rapidly his invention was made use of, he said in a letter to a friend 'that he might easily have made a fortune out of it,' if he had used it for his own purposes. But the fortunes made out of it were acquired by others, who knew better

than he how to turn a scientific discovery to pecuniary profit.

The use of india-rubber as a means of erasing pencil marks dates from Joseph Priestley. In his day bottle india-rubber was used chiefly for mending sails of ships and sailors' waterproof garments. But he discovered that it might be used for rubbing out marks on paper, and called public attention to it, and immediately others made a brisk trade out of his discovery, a cubic piece of india-rubber, half an inch in size, selling at three shillings.

Priestley was the pioneer in what is now known as Eudiometry, the process of measuring the purity of air, or of gaseous mixtures, by the eudiometer. The rough and ready method of plunging living mice into poisonous air as a test did not commend itself to him either as humane or scientific. He therefore substituted 'nitrous air' (nitrogen dioxide) which, he says, exhibits an amazing power of devouring 'a quantity of another kind of air half as large as itself,

and yet is so far from gaining any addition to its bulk, that it is considerably diminished by it.' It has been found that the 'nitrous air' test is not sufficiently accurate for modern gasometric analysis; and better eudiometers have been invented. But Priestley was the pioneer. He had a marvellous faculty for starting things. He led the way.

Priestley was the discoverer also of oxygen, which made such an enormous advance in the study of chemistry. Roscoe and Schorlemmer say, 'No one obtained more important results or threw more light upon the chemical existence of a number of different gases than Joseph Priestley.' He was experimenting one day with his burning glass on various substances contained in tubes filled with mercury, and he found that the gas coming from one of them had the property of making the spark of a taper burst into flame. He found that when he breathed it, 'his breast felt,' as he says, 'peculiarly light and easy for some time afterwards, and that mice

plunged into it grew extraordinarily active.' From which he drew the conclusion that animal life would soon be exhausted by living too fast in this new kind of air; and he says, gravely, 'A moralist at least may say that the air which Nature has provided for us is as good as we deserve.'

As usual he was the pioneer, but, as usual, others made most use of his discovery; and others, especially Lavoisier, got the credit. For though Priestley had discovered the new gas, he never understood its properties in their true scientific aspect, and he called it 'dephlogisticated air' to the end of his days, and this name contained in itself a theory which, strangely enough, debarred him from understanding oxygen in its chemical nature. But he had discovered it, as he had discovered so many other things. He conferred upon the world all the possibilities of use and value which have resulted from man's knowledge of their existence.

Priestley, who was obliged to seek

refuge in Pennsylvania to end his days in peace from persecution at home, was one of the world's great benefactors.

Michael Servetus discovered the pulmonary circulation of the blood. Harvey has the credit, and I do not wish to detract from any merit Harvey may rightly claim. But *litera scripta manet*, and Servetus described it in his 'Christianismi Restitutio,' printed in 1553. This was twenty-five years before Harvey was born, and sixty-six years before Harvey announced the full fact of circulation in 1619. Servetus, the Spanish physician whom Calvin burnt to death, murdering him by judicial process because he denied the doctrine of the Trinity, was a great benefactor of the world (1511-1553).

It was said of Henry Cavendish at Cambridge that 'he was nothing but a Unitarian,' and it is now said of him, as it is said of Priestley, that modern chemical investigation could not have achieved what it has but for his labours (1731-1810).

The city of Leyden has raised a monu-

ment to Hermann Boerhaave, 'the health-bringer,' one of the greatest physicians of the eighteenth century. He was a pronounced Unitarian; and of him 'miracles' of healing are recorded—miracles worked by the sober methods of scientific hygiene (1668-1738)

Hundreds of names of Unitarians might be mentioned who have done something of practical use for mankind had my discontented friend cared to search.

I need not mention the work of Sir Isaac Newton, it is so well known. But I find that our own people are often shy in claiming him as a Unitarian. Personally, I do not think there can be any more doubt about the fact than there can be about the Unitarianism of Milton. I do not think any one of you has ever used stronger arguments against the Trinity from the Bible than are to be found in Milton's treatise 'On Christian Doctrine' compiled from the Holy Scriptures alone. In this posthumous work we find his last thoughts on the Trinity, especially in the chapters

on the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. The work leaves no possible doubt about Milton's position. It may be commended to speakers on the Van Mission; for our hearers persistently pin their faith to the letter of the Bible, and Milton supplies just the kind of rigid Biblical arguments to meet them.

Brewster says of Newton that he cannot be called an anti-Trinitarian. How anyone who has read his 'Historical account of two notable corruptions of Scripture' can doubt his anti-Trinitarian position, I cannot conceive. Brewster himself appears to be doubtful, for he agrees that certain expressions in this work are such as 'a believer in the doctrine of the Trinity is not likely to have used'; yet 'they warrant us only to *suspect* his orthodoxy.' He, however, tells us in his preface that the public had long suspected it, and he generously adds, 'What the gifted mind of Newton believed to be truth, I dare not pronounce to be error.' Dr. Thomson, quoted by Brewster, is right when he

says, 'Newton's religious opinions were not "orthodox"; for example, he did not believe in the Trinity. This gives us the reason why Horsley, the champion of the Trinity, found Newton's papers unfit for publication.' Newton, like Priestley, was a great benefactor of the world (1642-1727).

John Dollond, a professed Unitarian, invented the achromatic telescope. After years of experiment he succeeded in combining lenses of different refracting media in such a way as to produce images free from the prismatic fringe, which had hitherto formed the chief defect of the refracting telescope, a defect which Newton had predicted could never be removed. Yet thirty-one years after Newton's death Dollond had removed it, and his discovery has become of permanent practical use to mankind (1706-1761).

The variety of public usefulness of members of our household of faith is well exhibited in the case of Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795), who was not merely a great potter, and a great artist

among potters, but also an active advocate of the abolition of the slave traffic, and a Free Trader before Cobden.

So also Thomas Bayley Potter was not merely a successful merchant of textile goods in Manchester, but he was the founder of the Cobden Club, which has done more than any other institution to keep before the country the economic advantages of Free Trade. He was Honorary Secretary of the Club for over thirty years.

Look, now, at another aspect of this matter. Who was the pioneer of the *Sunday School*? We must concede to Robert Raikes the merit of having made the Sunday school a popular institution. It was certainly due to him and to a few friends of his that publicity was given to the practice of Sunday teaching. His school in Gloucester became widely known owing to his account of it in the *Gloucester Journal*, which attracted much attention. This was in 1780. But he was not the pioneer. Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808) had started his Sunday

school in 1764, and had been teaching for sixteen years when Raikes began.

Who was the pioneer of the *Ragged School*? You must go to the humble workshop of John Pounds (1766-1839) in Portsmouth to find him. A cripple from his youth (for he had damaged himself in the dockyard when quite young), he had taken to shoemaking for a living; and having taken under his charge a little nephew, also a cripple, he felt the need of having companions for his solitary pupil. These he tried to instruct while engaged with his hammer and lapstone. A true philanthropist was John Pounds, who needed neither silver nor gold for his philanthropy; but what he had he gave: his kind heart and faithful mind. The one led him to gather the little waifs and strays, both boys and girls, of the Portsmouth streets into his workshop; and the other led him to impart to them what knowledge he had; for he felt that if he could rescue these poor children from the streets, he should rescue them from moral death;

and if he could rescue them from ignorance he was putting into their hands the means of decent livelihood, and giving them a chance in the battle of life. He had no 'Improved Spelling Books,' or 'Graduated Readers,' or arithmetics on 'Scientific Principles.' Old handbills, scraps of newspapers, and such like things were his reading books, and bits of broken slate were his exercise books. Common sense was his method. Love was his guide; for he loved the poor little boys and girls who came to him. He was their teacher; he was their nurse when they were sick; he was their tailor when their garments were too ragged for decency; he was their friend always, and many a man and woman in respectable circumstances later, had to thank him for all they were worth. Letters came to him from beyond the sea from grateful pupils who never forgot what they owed him, not merely for material advancement, but for the example of a simple, manly life; for their knowledge of an untainted heart, a gentle, kindly

soul, whose simplicity was its strength, and whose tender care of the poor and destitute was its immortal nobility.

He took the children to the Sunday school of the High Street Chapel, furnishing them with clothes to make them feel respectable. He was more than father and mother to many a neglected waif. He was, in his humble way, and quite unconsciously, a great philanthropist. His scheme was later taken up (in 1847) by Dr. Thomas Guthrie, of Edinburgh, and to him is often attributed the origin of the ragged schools. But he himself says : ‘ When the day comes when honour will be done to whom honour is due, I can fancy the crowd of those whose fame poets have sung, and to whose memory monuments have been raised, dividing like a wave, and (passing the great, and the noble, and the mighty of the land) this poor, obscure old man (John Pounds) stepping forward and receiving the especial notice of him who said “ Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it unto me.” ’

Industrial Schools are the direct descendants of the little ragged school John Pounds started. For the ragged school movement grew when it was seen how efficacious the schools were in providing education for destitute children, and in preventing them from falling into vagrancy and crime. Many industrial schools now in existence stand upon the actual site of the ragged schools which various philanthropists founded in imitation of the old Portsmouth school. The work of Mary Carpenter (1807-1877) helped the movement on. She too was a Unitarian who did something of practical use to mankind. She was a pioneer in many directions. Not only in Industrial Schools and Reformatories at home was her work crowned with success, but in India also her work for the education and social elevation of women has left a permanent mark behind it. Some of her ideas are only now, in our time, bearing fruit—her advocacy of free day schools, and of the feeding of poor children to enable them physically to do

justice to and profit by the lessons of the teacher, are now part of the practical methods of our latest educational wisdom.

Who was the pioneer of the *Domestic Mission Movement*? It is impossible to speak too highly of the value of our Domestic Missions. I wish there were a Domestic Mission connected with every one of our churches throughout the length and breadth of the land. If such were the case, we should have done much towards the solution of many apparently insoluble problems of rescue work, and the Salvation Army would hardly have been needed. Who was the pioneer? Again a Unitarian, Dr. Joseph Tuckerman (1788-1840). With an instinct amounting almost to genius for reaching the heart of gold in the most degraded, he made the slums of Boston his province; and there he preached the gospel of love and hope, and did the work of the good Samaritan among the victims of intemperance and vice, and ministered to such as were left half-dead by the wayside, bruised and wounded by

the sins of society, and the brutalities of competition and commercialism. He was a true friend to the poor, and the missionary in every Domestic Mission founded after his visit to England in 1833 is now a friend to the poor. The misfortune is that we have been able to establish comparatively so few.

Who was the pioneer of the *Working Men's Club*? The Working Men's Club and Institute Union, founded in 1862, came into existence through the energy and enthusiasm of the late Rev. Henry Solly. Moved by deep sympathy with the poor, and eager to do something to brighten the monotony of the working man's life, he conceived the idea of establishing clubs for social recreation and mutual improvement. The old Mechanics' Institutes had failed to attract the working classes. They were not managed on a sufficiently democratic basis, and they lacked that social element which draws working men together when their labour is done for the day. Mr. Solly's idea was to make the clubs self-supporting,

independent, and self-governed. They were to be neutral in politics and religion. Gambling and drunkenness were to be prohibited, and rules were to be strictly enforced to maintain a high standard of orderly moral behaviour. He understood exactly what was needed, and his anticipations were amply justified. Before his death in 1903, there were upwards of three thousand Working Men's Clubs in different parts of the country, with a membership of over a million. Not all the Clubs belonged to the Union; but all owed their existence directly or indirectly to his initiative. The Union has now a permanent habitation in London. It supports a Convalescent Home for invalid members. It has a large library, with a lending department for provincial Clubs belonging to the Union. It has 'first aid' classes for ambulance work. The Clubs have fully justified their existence, and their value is now recognized everywhere. The Working Men's Club is of Unitarian parentage.

I will now content myself by mention-

ing the pioneers in four other modern philanthropic developments which have been of immense advantage to afflicted humanity :—(1) The modern system of treatment of the deaf, dumb, and blind, towards which none contributed so much as Dr. Howe, of Boston ; (2) the modern system of treatment of the insane, in which Dorothea Lynde Dix was unquestionably the pioneer ; (3) the modern ambulance system in war, instituted by Florence Nightingale ; (4) the modern system of district nursing, established by the philanthropic energy of the late William Rathbone. All these matters stand out pre-eminently as modern developments, and one and all were started by Unitarians.

Dr. Howe worked what would certainly have been called miracles in the past, in the case of Laura Bridgman. She was deaf, dumb, and blind ; knowledge was completely shut out except through touch. But under Howe's care she woke up from stupor to intellectual life. With infinite patience, infinite kindness, infinite

compassion for the poor afflicted girl, he first made her understand that certain signs on the fingers meant certain things, and then certain ideas. Then, by means of embossed letters, he connected words with things and ideas in the same way. For a long time poor Laura conceived of these things only as play, until it seemed, all of a sudden, to flash into her mind that here was a method by which she could communicate her thoughts to people around her. That was a glorious awakening for the poor child, and Howe's loving patience was rewarded. From that moment her whole being seemed changed. Her bodily health improved with the expanding of her mind. She was a new creature. It was almost as if Dr. Howe, with a magic wand, had endowed a marble statue with life. Before many years were over she had correspondents all over the world. She learned history, mathematics; got all the elements of a liberal education. She was saved from a life of hopeless, helpless darkness to a life of happy usefulness and contentment.

From that day to this a more rational treatment of the deaf, dumb, and blind—a more humane treatment too—has been pursued, and with the best results.

It would take too long to tell the story of the magnificent heroism of Dorothea Dix (1802-1887) in her life-long struggle for the amelioration of the wretched lot of the insane; how she fought single-handed against stupidity, brutality, ignorance, and not only on behalf of the miserable inmates of the so-called 'homes' for the insane—'hells' were a more fitting word—but also on behalf of prisoners in the loathsome gaols of America and of Scotland. Robert Chambers said: 'It is a disgrace that the existence of such evils was overlooked by the clergy and officials of my native country, and brought to light by a fragile woman of such weakly constitution that she can scarcely walk half a mile, an American by birth, a Unitarian by creed.' She was a genuine benefactor of the world.

I need hardly mention the work of Florence Nightingale, an angel of mercy;

if not now a Unitarian herself, born in a Unitarian home, where she learned of Unitarian parents the principles that made her life one long beneficent service to the world. The merit of the good Samaritan will always attach to her name. She was 'neighbour' to the victims of disease and war, in a crisis in which cruel official blundering might almost be applauded for having forced such a benefactor into her rightful sphere. The anagram of her name is 'Flit on, cheering angel.' Never was anagram more appropriate and felicitous.

And the origin of *District Nursing*? You must go to Liverpool for that, to Greenbank, the home of William Rathbone, who, when his wife was on her death-bed, was so much struck with the skill of a trained nurse that he conceived the idea of the immense advantage it would be in the homes of the poor to be able to have skilled nurses to help them in the worst times of sickness in the home. He put his idea into actual practice. He paid trained nurses to go into some

of the Liverpool slums, and the boon was so great that he paid for more nurses. And then he built a school where nurses might be trained, until, with the help of others who were impressed by the good work his nurses were everywhere doing, he established the Jubilee Institute, which is doing a work incalculable in its widespread beneficence. The whole system of district nursing, now extending all over the kingdom, dates from the year 1859, when he first conceived the thought and put it into practical operation.

I commend to the notice of those who do not know it a work to which I am much indebted, 'Memorable Unitarians,' a marvellously cheap shilling's-worth. It is a thesaurus of reliable information; and I think it only right that the British public, who are often so ignorant of all that concerns Unitarians and Unitarianism, should have their minds enlightened as to the immense benefits they enjoy which have been conferred upon them by the practical Christian sympathy of Unitarians.

MILTON AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

THE splendour of Milton's contribution to the literature of our country is everywhere acknowledged. His political significance is less generally known, and even where there is some acquaintance with his writings in this field it is not always accompanied with the admiration that rests solidly on sympathy of opinion. But Milton the poet cannot be separated from Milton the advocate of liberty, and any attempt to estimate his greatness aright involves a serious study of his controversial writings. And of even more importance than the just verdict of criticism is the preservation of the highest life of human thought, and the perpetuation of those vigorous impulses which contribute to the progress of our race. The brilliance of Milton's genius is not more certain than the fruitful virility of his civic temper. The sound of his voice through the genera-

tions has been like that of a trumpet, rousing not his own countrymen alone, but men of far distant lands, to claim their freedom and use it as free men should.

It might appear to a superficial reader of his pamphlets that they belong to a worn-out controversy, and that their interest is purely historical, if not merely antiquarian. No greater mistake could be made. True, their style and diction smack of an ancient vintage; the persons and incidents introduced have been long dead and are much forgotten. True, also, that Milton was so deeply saturated with classic and medieval lore that he sometimes overwhelms the reader with names and instances, where a modern debater, more or less happily unencumbered with erudition, goes straight to the point in language unadorned. But not all these things, nor the difficulties of taste—which are real and sometimes serious—can prevent him from deeply touching his audience, if ‘fit,’ and waking their enthusiasm. For he deals with the problems that only change outwardly with the changing generations,

their essence remaining the same for all. How far should the individual allow his rights of free thought, free speech, and free action to be subordinated to the supposed welfare of society? That some subordination is necessary if society is to exist is obvious. It was as clearly recognized by Milton as it could be by the most absolute of governors. His passion for freedom did not blind him to the risk of mere chaos; we may be surprised by some of the limitations even he would set up in the state. But, while mindful of order, his might and skill were devoted to the attempt to secure for men the utmost possible degree of liberty, as he conceived it; and his conception far outran that of most of his contemporaries. In some important respects his ideal is still in advance, although, thanks largely to the struggle which at his death seemed to have failed, civic and religious liberty has long attained in this country to the position of a dominant, if not wholly prevalent, principle.

Liberty, civil and religious—this was ‘the good old cause’ for which those dead

and gone reformers fought, triumphed, and suffered in the times of the early Stuarts. It was never supposed that the civil element could be separated from the religious. A church establishment was considered as necessary as a government. The struggle between Protestantism and Catholicism, or between Presbyterianism and Episcopacy, was not, except in a proleptic sense, a struggle for religious freedom. The immediate question was, which party should rule the other, not how all parties should manage to live peaceably together. In this country the supposed necessity of a temporal supremacy for the church led to the absurd fiction, as we now see it to be, that the hereditary sovereign was somehow the divinely appointed guardian of the Faith. The eyes of some few were from the first, doubtless, wide open to the absurdity of the thing; certainly, the efforts of zealous papists were not lacking that men should see how much inferior in this respect a King must be to a solemnly chosen priest, all his life immersed in holy things, and elevated to supremacy only

after a career which at least secured to the church a theological expert, if not a saint. But, once for all, the breach had been made; and the more Laud and his high-church supporters recoiled from surrender to the pope, the more they were driven to the alternative of exalting the power and prerogative of their monarch.

Charles I, like his father before him, was delighted with the ascription to himself of unquestionable authority, in Church as well as in State. Even such egregious preaching before his Court as that of Mainwaring was not enough to revolt the King's appetite. 'The King is not bound,' said this warmly approved chaplain, 'to observe the laws of the realm concerning the rights and liberties of his subjects, but his royal will and command doth oblige the subjects' conscience upon pain of eternal damnation.' And the preacher added, with respect to parliament, 'The slow proceedings of such great assemblies are not fitted for the supply of the state's urgent necessities.' It happened that parliament was quick

enough to punish him, but Charles soon released him and gave him a rich living. This was two years before the memorable experiment was begun of ruling this country without a parliament.

How pregnant of evil that experiment proved is well known. It left notable results in the mind and life of Milton. He was still a student at Cambridge when the Parliament of 1629 was dismissed. It is clear that already his thoughts were more centred upon attaining literary excellence than upon fitting himself for that career in the church to which his father had destined him. When he left Cambridge, in 1632, it was with a feeling that he was not called to be a clergyman. The profession of the law, to which he seems to have turned his attention for a short time, also left him unattracted. So far as he had tried his hand at 'prosing or versing,' he had found, he says, 'the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live.' He therefore tried to comfort his father with a Latin poem in which he suggested there was something after all in being father of

a poet. And thus, for six years or so, he continued his studies, 'turning over the Greek and Latin writers,' occasionally running up from Horton, near Windsor, his father's home, to search the London book-shops; and giving some little time to 'learning something new in mathematics or music, in which sciences,' he says, 'I then delighted.' Perhaps it was the happiest, certainly it was the most peaceful period of his life. It was the time when he wrote 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,' and 'Comus,' and proved by these poems that his frequently expressed ambitions were not the empty vapourings of idle self-conceit. It was a time, however, closed, so far as his literary production was concerned, by the writing of 'Lycidas' (1637), where the shadow not of private grief alone, but of public trouble, indignation, and apprehension, marks the full coming of age of Milton's genius. It is here, as his own prefatory note of 1645 states, that he 'by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy then in their height'; and who needs to be reminded of the dark

hint the poem gives as to 'that two-handed engine at the door' that 'stands ready to smite once and smite no more'?

Samuel Johnson, in his memorable essay on Milton, says 'the thoughts of obedience, whether canonical or civil, raised his indignation,' and thus he curtly passes by the poet's declaration that he declined the ministry because whoever became a clergyman must 'subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, which, unless he took with a conscience that could retch, he must straight perjure himself. He thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing.' This declaration was made later, but it must be a true statement of Milton's feeling as a young student leaving the university. What had happened in the meantime to move him to the language of 'Lycidas'?

The answer is sufficiently suggested by the name of Laud. That able, sincere, devoted, but narrow-minded ecclesiastic had sought by all available means to establish in this country a system of

religion in which there should be allowed one doctrine and one form alone. The doctrine may have been more reasonable than the ultra-calvinism of the Puritans ; the form of worship was certainly more beautiful in externals than theirs. If Milton's references in 'Il Penseroso' to 'storied windows,' the 'full-voiced quire,' the 'service high and anthems clear,' count for anything, as doubtless they should, he had no quarrel with Laud's ideal of embodying in public worship 'the beauty of holiness.' If his expressions of prayerful aspiration uttered here and there in the earlier pamphlets are evidence, his doctrinal orthodoxy at this period was unexceptionable. Thus far there was no obvious ground of offence in Laudism. But the bad means employed to establish this system far outweighed all the merits it might possess intrinsically. From the first Laud had separated the clergy into two lists, 'O' (for orthodox) and 'P' (for puritan) ; and the one set were encouraged and promoted, while the other were harshly repressed. Unhappily for Laud, though

he himself thought far otherwise then, he was in so exalted a position in the state that hardly any measures of reward and punishment were beyond his command; and the power to tyrannize, which has proved fatal to other reputations, was conspicuously so to his. His finger, too, was in every pie, as men said; for as the Church looked to the Crown as the fount of absolute authority, the Crown looked to the Church for its most subservient instruments. The detested courts of High Commission and the Star Chamber, by means of which the ordinary, and therefore most cherished, civil rights of citizens were flagrantly set at naught, were manned by prelates along with the lay officers of state; and the records show that (whether to their credit or not in such a business) the ecclesiastics were severer and more exacting than the other Lords. Such a state of things was not only exasperating; it inevitably had disastrous effects on those who carried off the spoils of place and profit; and, unless the observation of Milton and other acute minds was

grossly mistaken, there was a lamentable loss of practical piety in the Church as a whole.

At last the volcanic forces, long repressed, broke forth. Milton was to have a full share in the strife ensuing. After the publication of 'Lycidas,' in a University volume, in 1638, he had enjoyed the one supreme delight of his life in a journey to Italy which covered some fifteen months. His intense interest in the classic scenes long familiar to him by name, in the rich beauty of that sunny southern land and its famous cities, and, not least, in the society of the men of talent and learning whom he met, may be imagined. The significance of this experience was immense to himself; he treasured and did not blush to print the greetings and encomiums of celebrities whose praise was praise indeed. Doubtless it added in after years to his power as a defender of England's rights in the forum of civilized Europe to have been known so long before as the scholar, the poet, the accomplished and graceful personality who had descended from the chilly north upon

the admiring circles of Florence, Naples, and Rome. But there was more in it. Milton's travels brought him face to face with the actual results of triumphant ecclesiastical tyranny. Warned as he had been by that experienced diplomatist and good man, Sir Henry Wotton, that he would do well to have 'thoughts close, looks loose,' the young Englishman found the advice hard to follow. Even in Laud-ridden England private speech was free, but in Italy, under papal or Spanish rule, while he, a stranger, spoke his mind with alarming freedom, the Inquisition infected the minds of men with a slavish fear. The celebrated Manso himself, the friend and biographer of Tasso, evidently shrank from the dangers incurred by conversation with the bold young poet who was his guest at Naples. It was so at Rome we gather; and at Florence the signal example of Galileo, with whom Milton had long-remembered intercourse, showed the baleful influence of the thing called Orthodoxy. 'I could recount,' he says in his *Areopagitica* (1644), 'what I have seen and

heard in other countries, where this kind of inquisition tyrannizes; when I have sat among their learned men, for that honour I had, and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was, while they themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning amongst them was brought; that this was it which had damped the glory of Italian wits, that nothing had been there written now these many years but flattery and fustian. There it was that I found and visited the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition for thinking in astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought.'

In 1639, earlier than he wished, for he would fain have extended his travels to Greece, Milton found himself at home again, and before long he was taking his part in the great struggle for the rights of the subject against the King, and the rights of the individual thinker against external authority. It is with the latter aspect that we are here chiefly concerned, though

the two blend together inextricably. Setting aside his 'garland and singing robes' he plunged into that arena of public discussion which was to number its pamphlets by tens of thousands before the Restoration came. A good many of the pamphlets were worthless enough, the mere spumy lava that had to find vent somehow, but among the treatises of the time, Milton's, at least, remain a permanent addition to literature. Looking back, sadly but self-justified, on this period of wrangling with wrangling men, he says it was his aim to do what he could to secure liberty, 'religious, domestic, and civil.' His series of treatises begins with five on the subject of Church discipline. They show him to have been at this period (1641-43) convinced that a Presbyterian form of church government was by far preferable to the Episcopal which, whether in Roman or Anglican guise, had allied itself so irrevocably with political absolutism. The Protestant lands of Europe had mostly espoused the Presbyterian system; Scotland, in particular, presented close at hand this type as the

only alternative, apparently, to Episcopacy; and political reasons of the hour lent overwhelming weight to its plea for adoption by England. Thus we find Milton directing the full force of his learned argument against the pretensions of the prelates, and in defence of what was certainly in theory a more democratic ecclesiastical order.

It is pathetic to observe the recurring notes of the poet's hopes and longings as we follow him through this tangled mass of prose. He evidently hoped that the present troubles would soon subside, and that the nation would find itself free for nobler efforts of self-development. Midway in his third tract, for instance, which bears the illustrative title 'Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnuus' (1641), he breaks out into a sustained flight of eloquent address to God, beseeching him to 'perfect and accomplish' his 'glorious acts.' In the course of this address we read—'And he that now for haste snatches up a plain ungarnished present as a thank-offering to thee, which could not be deferred in regard of thy so

many late deliverances wrought for us one upon another, may then perhaps take up a harp, and sing thee an elaborate song to generations.' His hopes in this direction were destined to disappointment. The 'settled peace in the Church' for which he prayed was not so easy to attain, and the very efforts put forth to establish Presbyterianism in the place of Episcopacy only opened the way for a fresh exhibition of ecclesiastical tyranny. Milton's own peace was shattered by domestic troubles. His girl-wife ran home to Oxfordshire after some two months' sojourn with a husband double her age and, it must be feared, little adapted by temperament and preoccupations to soothe the feelings of an immature bride in the first loneliness of a new home. He thereupon lost terribly little time in calling public attention to the vexed problems of marriage and divorce, and the subject occupied his mind greatly for about two years. Four or five pamphlets remain to show how characteristically thorough was his study of the questions involved, and how fixed his conclusion, in spite of

much natural public alarm and some persecution, that marriage is essentially a civil contract, and should not be forcibly maintained where the duties and solaces of the married state are impossible through incompatibility. The point most noteworthy here is that Milton clearly opposed the sacramental theory of marriage, involving as that theory does the agency of a specially endowed priesthood. Happily, this divorce-literature period was brought to an end by a reconciliation between the young wife and her stern husband, and they lived together consistently thereafter, however ill-mated, till her death in 1652.

Midway in the period just referred to came the *Areopagitica*, that matchless oration constructed on the Greek model, pleading for the freedom of the press. It is as Miltonic a piece as anything he ever wrote, and it has deservedly received peculiar attention. Who that has read it can forget its ringing eloquence, the long, thunderous roll of its periods broken with flashes of wit, sarcasm, and lofty imagination, and sparkling with perfect phrase ?

Here is the very accent of that spirit in man that alone gives guarantee of attaining finally, though late, to the glorious liberty of the sons of God. 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.' 'Truth is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain ; if her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken in a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. A man may be a heretic in the truth ; and if he believes things only because his pastor says so, or the assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy.' 'Behold now this vast city : a city of refuge, the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection ; the shop of war hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleaguered truth, than there are pens and

heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present us, as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching Reformation ; others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement.’ ‘ Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple ; who ever knew truth put to the worse in free and open encounter ? ’ ‘ If all cannot be of one mind—as who looks they should be ?—this doubtless is more wholesome, more prudent, and more Christian : that many be tolerated rather than all compelled.’ In these and other such utterances Milton became the voice of all progressive free thought.

The severity of the censorship against which he strove so earnestly was but a symptom of that disease of tyranny that shows itself wherever one man, or set of men, is exalted over the rest by the pretended possession of the sole authority to

teach what is true. A year or two more of bitter experience compelled Milton to despair of the Presbyterians. They were 'forcers of conscience,' and 'new presbyter was but old priest writ large.' All hope of religious liberty in the land settled more and more upon that very mixed complex of prophesying, Oliver Cromwell's army. The struggle between the two forces of Presbyterian orthodoxy and this motley Independency reached a climax on the one side when the Presbyterians issued their terrible ordinance against heresy; on the other when the power of the sword usurped the authority of Parliament, abolished the monarchy, and thenceforward held Presbyterianism in check. The violence and illegality of the soldiers, with Cromwell at their head, every one knows: some condemn, some justify them. But the quite frightful outbreak of orthodox insanity that was manifested in the ordinance of 1648 is less known or noted. To be sure it was largely as futile as it was insane; but that was not the fault of its originators. Nor did it represent a pass-

ing aberration. In 1645, the Presbyterians in Parliament passed an earlier ordinance making it an offence for a minister not to use the official directory, or to preach, write or print, or cause to be written or printed, anything in the derogation or depraving of the said book. Could Laud himself have been more peremptory? But in the ordinance of 1648, the Westminster Assembly now ending its protracted labours, it was prescribed that any person denying the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, or the resurrection of the body, or that the separate books of Scripture are each the Word of God, and refusing on trial to abjure his heresy 'shall suffer the pain of death.' A further series of heresies, including the assertion 'that the Church government by Presbytery is anti-Christian or unlawful,' involved imprisonment.

Whether Milton had personal reason by this time to regard such a decree with alarm and horror it might be difficult to prove. That John Goodwin, the celebrated city preacher, was at once Milton's friend and 'suspected of Socinianism' does

not take us far. But, apart from the unorthodoxy of his great epics, we know now definitely, from the posthumous work on 'Christian Doctrine,' that as the years advanced the poet's theology became distinctly anti-Trinitarian; and in a significant passage in the pamphlet on 'True Religion,' published in 1673, the year before his death, he implies that Arians and Socinians are in the right in refusing to be bound by the technical terms of Trinitarian dogma, which are not to be found in the Bible. Did he know that, within half a mile of his home, when he was a child of three, Bartholomew Legate was burnt in Smithfield, in the presence of a huge concourse, for heresy on this point? At any rate he must have known that Paul Best, after close imprisonment, was in 1646 voted to be hanged for denying the Trinity. Still more certainly he must have been familiar with the case of the Unitarian John Bidle. This truly heroic man met the publication of the 1648 ordinance with a direct challenge published with his full name. An angry clamour rose for his

death ; but Independency had too many possible theological delinquents of one degree or other in its ranks to permit this beginning of executions. Five times was Bidle imprisoned under the Puritan rule ; a sixth time, in 1662, resulted in his dying from disease. That Milton must have known of Bidle, and that he was well acquainted with Oliver Cromwell's action in saving him from the gallows, is as certain as anything can be of which we have no historical evidence. It was a typical case. Here was a good and earnest man, guiltless of any crime except difference of opinion, and if Orthodoxy could have its way, he must be done to death. It is not necessary for Milton to have been himself a heretic in order that such a mind as his should strongly condemn so monstrous an evil.

That Milton stood staunch by Cromwell, even when 'necessity, the tyrant's plea,' led to gross illegality, need not be proved at length. It is sufficient to remind ourselves of the panegyric of Cromwell placed by him in his 'Second Defence of the People of England' (1654). It is a panegy-

ric, however, not without discrimination. There was something of serious importance in which Cromwell's Latin secretary differed from his master. Several years before, in the famous sonnet beginning 'Cromwell, our chief of men,' Milton was not satisfied merely to eulogize. He pointed to great duties still awaiting. 'New foes arise, threatening to bind our souls in secular chains.' The Independents had kept the persecuting forces of Presbyterian orthodoxy in check, but it remained a formidable power. Its ministers were securely entrenched in good livings, and from positions of unassailable possession they threatened the free life of the mind at every turn, in the parish, in the university, in the seats of legislation. 'Help us,' Milton beseeches Cromwell, 'to save free conscience from the paw of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw.' It is the deep note of 'Lycidas' again, but now directed against the new spiritual tyranny that had succeeded to the old. Cromwell, with his persistent desire to 'settle religion' by a system of parochial endowment by the aid

of tithes, may have been in closer touch than Milton with the current notions of men. Again and again, however, Milton returned to the attack on the 'hirelings'—by whom he meant, not ministers who accepted the voluntary offerings of those who benefited by their ministrations, but those who were recipients of national revenues, and especially those who would seize upon a tenth part of men's goods for their own profit. As long as fat livings were the prize, he saw that there would be grabbing before, and insolence after they were won. And it had always particularly offended his scholarly mind to observe the slothful and inept performances of these 'insatiable hirelings.' In his twentieth year, when at college, he had expressed contempt for the generality of budding divines, who with the scantiest outfit of learning were 'content too lightly to pick up as much theology as may suffice for anyhow sticking together a little sermon, and stitching it over with worn rags from other quarters.' We have seen above how contemptuously he re-

garded the practice of doctrinal subscription. In his 'Tenure of Kings,' issued a fortnight after the execution of Charles I, he not only pushes home with unsparing logic upon the Presbyterian lamenters of that act the deep responsibility they had themselves incurred in pursuing the policy that led up to it; he roundly tells the Westminster assembly divines they would do well to 'study harder,' and not be content with 'mounting twice into the chair with a formal preachment huddled up at the odd hours of a whole lazy week' ! His severity is not confined to the ministers either. In one of his two pamphlets published in 1659—'The Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church'—he specially chides those who 'to avoid the dire labour of understanding their own religion, are content to lodge it in the breast, or rather in the books, of a clergyman, and to take it thence by scraps and mammocks, as he dispenses it in his Sunday's dole.'

Milton's idea of a free, intelligent religion supported voluntarily was, indeed, far

ahead of his time. His pleas and rebukes were for the most part unheeded, but who shall say that they will not some day be heard? However that be, it cannot be said that his strenuous eloquence for 'liberty' arose from an indifference to religion and truth. Never was a soul more truly dedicated to highest aims. His ambition as a poet could be contented with nothing short of supreme excellence—the noblest themes set forth in a dress worthy of their nobility. His resolution as a man was to make his own life a poem. When the stormy period of warfare was ended that had so long employed his genius's 'left hand'—for he confessed pamphleteering only allowed him the use of that—he could look back upon it all without self-accusation. He had fought the fight as well as he knew how, championing the cause of freedom against papacies of every kind, exultantly defending the fame of England before the civilized nations, pleading with unwearying sincerity with Englishmen to be worthy of their inheritance and high possibilities.

That he must now, at the last, himself like Galileo 'grown old' and blind, sing otherwise than he had hoped long ago, certainly cannot lessen our reverence for his memory. At the age of thirty-two, setting forth valiantly upon his share of the nation's great struggle, and sanguinely anticipating a speedy victory for the cause he held dear, the young Puritan poet said, 'Then, amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints, some one may perhaps be heard offering at high strains, in new and lofty measures, to sing and celebrate thy divine mercies and marvellous judgments in this land throughout all ages.' Nigh upon sixty, he gave the world the epic of 'Paradise Lost,' and still later the monumental tragedy of that mighty hero of Israel who was made a thrall by the Philistines. But as to the very last hour of the Commonwealth he had lifted up his voice for the lost cause when all others, from fear or worse motives, were silent, so to the end of his years he remained true to his principles, with a heart, like Channing's, 'always young for liberty.'

THE BROKEN IDOLS

Among the stories of Abraham preserved in Rabbinical literature there is one which tells that Terah, Abraham's father, not only had twelve idols which he worshipped, but was himself a maker of images and a dealer in them. This is so far in accordance with the Scripture narrative which somewhere refers to the time when the ancestors of Israel on the other side of the flood, i.e., the river Euphrates, served other gods. The story goes on to say that one day when Terah was absent, Abraham, having been left to manage the shop, thought the time had come when he must make a protest against idolatry. Accordingly, as the customers came in one after another to purchase idols he asked each one his age, and as they answered fifty or sixty years or whatever it might be, 'What a fool you are!' he exclaimed, 'to worship a god

younger than yourself ! You were born fifty years ago, and this idol was made only yesterday.' Then they went away ashamed. By and by an old woman came in with a dish of meal to set before the idols. Abraham took it, and then with a stick smashed all the gods except the biggest, into whose hands he then put the stick.

Terah, who was returning, heard the noise, and hastened in. When he entered there were all his gods scattered in fragments on the ground.

Terah was exceedingly angry and charged Abraham with breaking the idols ; but Abraham answered, ' My father, a woman brought this dish of meal for the gods, and when they all wanted to have it, the biggest knocked off the heads of all the rest.'

Terah said this could not be true for the gods were only images of wood and stone.

Then said Abraham, ' My father, let thine ear hear what thy mouth hath spoken ! ' And then he exhorted his father against idolatry, pointing out how foolish it was to worship gods who could not be trusted to protect themselves against the blows of a stick.

It would be rash to infer that there is any foundation in fact for this legend. The very existence of such a person as Abraham has, in our days, become open to dispute. According to some he is a purely imaginary being, invented according to a fashion not uncommon among early races to account for the origin of the Israelites and mark their unity as a nation ; while others have reduced him to a mere symbol of the sky, to which the name *Ab ram* (High Father) corresponds. But, however that may be, the legend which I have just narrated may be taken as typical of what is happening round us every day, of what many of us have ourselves experienced, and contains an instructive lesson for us all.

If not to Abraham, yet it has happened to many to find out that the objects they have been accustomed to hold in reverence are after all but false images and not divine at all, and the choice has come to them whether they will bravely face the fact and act upon it, even to the destruction of the objects of their former adoration, or whether they will shut their eyes, and against their

convictions conform to the customs and traditions of their age and country.

Abraham—if I may take his story as substantially true—was brought up to reverence and trust in the idols which his father made. It was not without many a severe mental struggle that he yielded at length to the *truth* which more and more forced itself upon his mind, that those idols were only clay and wood, made by men's hands, and not worthy of the worship of reasonable beings ; but when once he was fully convinced that it was so, and when the truth became clear to him that there was a God, invisible and eternal, speaking in his heart, who alone had a right to his service, he hesitated no longer, but, not caring though his craft was in danger, he smashed the idols on the making of which his bread depended, forsook his father's home, and went forth obedient to the voice of God, not knowing whither he went. The same thing happens in all ages, and is happening every day. It may happen to any of you who are only setting out on your soul's pilgrimage to find out that the

divinities you have been accustomed to worship, the objects of your trust and love, are no gods at all, but mere creatures of the human imagination, that the ideas and beliefs which you had been taught to think were fixed as the rock against which the surges have beat for a thousand years in vain, are utterly without foundation ; the supports round which your purest affections had twined, are unsubstantial as a summer cloud ; and then the crisis comes when you must decide whether you will sit down in your darkness, knowing it to be darkness, hugging the old superstitions now found out, clinging to the old conventionalisms, or go forth, like Abraham, into the wilderness, following the call of God whithersoever it may lead us, pursuing the star of Truth ' o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the night is gone,' and you find perhaps at last some secure resting place for your soul.

In this world there is no standing still. In man's knowledge of the visible world, and not less in his beliefs regarding things unseen, there is nothing so fixed and un-

alterable that it may not require to be corrected by fresh knowledge and deeper investigation. In religion there is no finality.

But progress cannot always be made without pain and strife. Old customs, deeply rooted beliefs, do not give way without a struggle. It is better when the new succeeds to the old quietly and without disturbance, when the old grows into the new by slow degrees and imperceptibly, so that no one can tell the precise moment at which any change has taken place, because in fact the change is going on continually. But this cannot always be, and sometimes the work of the iconoclast is necessary to rouse men from their apathy and compel their attention to truths they would otherwise neglect.

When Christianity was introduced into the world there was a great breaking of idols.

Do you suppose there were none who sincerely mourned the destruction of that religion of grace and beauty which gave birth to so many exquisite forms that still, even in their mutilated state, ravish the eye and entrance the heart—that religion

which erected the most majestic temples the world has ever seen and inspired much of its noblest verse ; that there were none to whom it felt like the rending of their very hearts when they beheld the bright and joyous rites of that old worship giving place to the gloomy mystery, as they deemed it, of the Christians—a crucified Jew succeeding to all the bright deities of Olympus—or who really saw in every calamity that fell upon the great Roman Empire the anger of the old gods at the neglect of their rites ? We are accustomed to think of all these things as mere superstitions, and to imagine that no reasonable being could possibly have any real belief in them, or any difficulty in parting with them. The truths of Christianity, it is thought, are so clear, so self-evident, so infinitely superior to anything paganism had to teach that they required merely to be stated in order to be at once joyfully embraced. But this is surely a very erroneous view resulting from a defective historical imagination and from want of sympathy. For the intelligent heathen

the case was precisely reversed. To him it was Christianity which appeared as a gloomy superstition which commended itself only to the ignorant and the wretched, while nothing, he thought, but the most extraordinary fanaticism and obstinacy enabled its professors to adhere to their principles. A generous breadth of sympathy would enable us to enter into these feelings without at all undervaluing the importance of the change from heathenism to Christianity. That change was not accomplished without many a hard struggle and many a bitter pang, without many heart-burnings and many blighted affections ; but that it was a necessary step in the onward march of mankind, and an immense moral gain, it is of course impossible to doubt.

And so it was also at the time of the Reformation. Legions of saints, martyrs who had poured out their blood for the faith, men and women who had forsworn the world and all its vanities to save their own souls and the souls of their fellows from the eternal fire, had taken the place

of the old gods of the heathen world, and were worshipped with the same fervour and the same belief in their power to help. The Virgin Mother, throned in heaven and standing on the moon, was sometimes put before the Almighty himself. The Church Catholic had spread out her arms to clasp, if it might be, the entire world in her embrace. There was no part of human life from the cradle to the grave which she did not pretend to control and direct. She took every human being under her protection on his entrance into life, guided his steps through its various vicissitudes, and at his departure undertook to provide him with a sure passport to heaven. Her priests professed to be able to control by their charms both the mind of God and the destiny of mortals. This was not all hypocrisy. It was not all fanaticism. The Roman Catholic system had grown up by slow degrees in the course of long ages, and had taken a firm hold both of the heart and the intellect of man. Human life is a mystery at the best, and the Catholic Church professed to explain it. Death is

a still deeper mystery, and the Catholic Church undertook to throw light upon it. Her forms, her doctrines, her sacraments were not the creation of any one man, of any Pope or priest or great individual genius, such as Hildebrand, who thought he could devise means to keep the human mind in subjection for evermore ; but they grew out of the human mind itself ; they were adapted to human nature as it was, and that was doubtless the secret of their strength. But the time came, as it was sure to do, when they no longer sufficed, when the mind had outgrown them as the man outgrows the things of childhood, and then came the struggle between the authority of the Church which had so long been accustomed to be obeyed and the free human intelligence. The Church, alarmed for her existence, set herself against all progress, all reform. She did her best to stamp out thought ; she put her ban upon free inquiry ; she frowned upon all learning which was not immediately consecrated to her service ; she attempted to repress science ; she resented

the slightest dissent from her doctrines, the least sign of resistance to her authority. Then it became necessary once more that there should be a general upturning. Then Luther arose in Germany, and Calvin in Geneva, and Knox in Scotland, and the Sozzini in Italy, and others elsewhere, declaring that there was no more help in the saints, that the Pope was antichrist, and the Catholic Church full of corruption and wickedness. There were many to whom such statements seemed horrible blasphemies, many who thought the world must be coming to an end when such sentiments could be openly expressed. Many a tender heart was wrung, many a pure conscience was outraged as the old church came tumbling down, and the old rites were abandoned and the priests of the old religion were compelled to fly. And yet this change was also necessary. The human mind could not remain for ever in leading strings to the Pope and his emissaries. Knowledge must increase. Science and literature must grow up and flourish. Thought and speculation must be free.

And from the change which was then accomplished has come the large free life of these later times, with its boundless activity, its far-reaching thought, its magnificent intellectual achievements, its profound researches into the nature of things and into the nature of man, its splendid hopes and promises for the future.

And as it was when Christianity was first promulgated, as it was at the time of the Reformation, so it is now. Old beliefs are falling away. Old doctrines have become discredited. The ideas and convictions to which our ancestors clung as if the very heavens must fall if a doubt were cast on them, have proved unsubstantial and vain. The anthropomorphic deity who made the world out of nothing in six days, and from a throne above the stars surveys all the doings of men, the Son of God who, in mercy to a lost race, comes down from heaven to give his life for mankind, the authoritative Bible of which every word is as true as if the Almighty himself had spoken it out of heaven—these ideas are passing away from the minds of intelli-

gent men, and will by and by be altogether as unreal, as shadowy and unsubstantial, as the saints of the Roman Church, with all their works of piety and their strange miracles, or the bright strong beings that, to the imagination of the ancient Greek, peopled the heights of blue Olympus.

Those whose memory will carry them back fifty years, even though they may have been children then, will know that at that time—in the year 1858 when he who now stands before you, an old man, was called to the ministry of this church—the *old* Free Church as we must call it now, with its Puritan theology and its rigid sabbatarianism, was in the ascendant—was, if I may so say, in the zenith of its power. Many of the fathers of that church—the leaders who for the sake of spiritual freedom had brought their people out from what they deemed a worldly establishment, and we must honour them for their courage and consistency in having done so—were still alive, and their influence was exerted to repress, so far as lay in their power, all freedom of thought and speech,

and to uphold in undefiled purity the evangelical faith. Children were carefully drilled in the Shorter Catechism. The Sabbath was observed with more than Jewish severity. Unitarianism was an almost unmentionable heresy. Indeed, there were many years when the word Unitarian was *taboo* in Edinburgh; and it seemed like entering on a new era when several years later an address of George Hope's to the Unitarian Association was reported in full in the *Scotsman* newspaper. No publisher would give his name to any Unitarian publication; no bookseller dared put on his counter any Unitarian book. 'The churches,' according to the historian of civilization in England, 'were as crowded as they were in the Middle Ages, and were filled with devout and ignorant worshippers who flocked together to listen to opinions of which the Middle Ages alone were worthy.' At the same time there were to be seen even then some foregleams of the approaching dawn—the dawn of a new Reformation. Other voices were beginning to be heard; other influences were beginning to make

themselves felt. Carlyle was preaching to a comparatively unheeding world his gospel of work, and in no veiled language had expressed his scorn for the 'Hebrew old clothes' of the popular faith. Emerson shed abroad the mild radiance of his transcendental philosophy. In 1859 Charles Darwin published his epoch-making book on the 'Origin of Species,' to be followed a few years later by that on the 'Descent of Man.' Henry Thomas Buckle's 'History of Civilization' was a scathing exposure of the superstition and bigotry of the covenanting divines of the seventeenth century, and of the intolerance that still prevailed in the Edinburgh of his own time. Herbert Spencer preached to a strictly select audience the gospel of Evolution, but slowly and by degrees the new ideas penetrated the popular mind. And meanwhile the conflict went on with vigour between Science and Religion—between the affirmations of science based on the observation of nature and the doctrines of a theology drawn from the Bible. Professors Huxley and Tyndall became prominent as the

champions of scientific truth against the dogmas of the evangelical theology, and as men not afraid to speak their minds they did much to awaken thought and vindicate the right of free speech. The theories of Chalmers and Hugh Miller for reconciling the Biblical story of creation with the geological record could no longer hold their ground in view of the most recent researches and especially of the doctrine of evolution. Moreover the Pentateuch narrative and its Mosaic authorship were now beginning to be called in question within the Church itself, and by professed theologians no less than by outside critics ; and since Bishop Colenso published his work exposing the arithmetical inconsistencies and exaggerations of the story of the Exodus it has become impossible for any candid man to maintain the literal truth of the narrative. The authors of the once famous 'Essays and Reviews,' of whom one was the revered Professor Jowett, Master of Balliol, and another Dr. Temple, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, denounced by the orthodox as the seven

champions against Christendom, did much by their daring thought and plain speech to spread the light in circles into which it might not otherwise have penetrated. The eminent Semitic scholar, Robertson Smith, settled the question of the authorship of the Pentateuch for the Scottish churches, and though he himself paid the penalty of his heresy by the loss of his professorship, no one would be arraigned now for almost any opinion he might hold either upon that or any other question of Biblical criticism.

But I need not pursue further this line of argument. The Puritan theology, it is sufficient to say, is based on the Bible, especially on the Pauline epistles; and with the infallibility of the Bible it must stand or fall. It assumes that the Bible throughout not only contains, but is, the Word of God written, and consequently if a single error can be detected in it, the whole foundation is proved unsound. But more than this, the theology of Paul which was taken over by the Church, is intimately associated with the chapters in Genesis which give an account of the origin and

the fall of man ; and if that account is discredited, the entire structure is overthrown. But it has long since become impossible to regard as literal truth any part of the Genesis narrative, or to accept the Biblical cosmology as in any sense representing the truth of things. The Puritan theology, in short, with its anthropomorphic creator, its local heaven and hell, its fall of man and its approaching day of fiery judgment, is totally out of keeping with the infinite heavens revealed by astronomy, with an earth revolving daily on its own axis, or with our knowledge that the human race had existed many thousands of years before the date assigned to the creation of the world by the Hebrew scribe. Consequently, that theology is doomed to pass away, is now passing away, together with all superstitions which cannot endure to be confronted with reasoned knowledge.

It is impossible for anyone to review intelligently the history of the last fifty years, and not be aware that during that time a new reformation has accomplished

itself, quite equal in importance to that of the sixteenth century, though it may not have made so much noise, or been attended by so many dramatic circumstances. And it is equally impossible to doubt that as the first Reformation originated in a revolt against the authority of the Church, or of the Pope as representing the Church, so this new Reformation is a revolt against the authority of the Bible as an infallible or inspired guide, whether in matters of faith or in matters of conduct.

‘The Bible,’ wrote the late Blanco White, the ex-Spanish priest, who having left his own church became first an Anglican clergyman and afterwards a Unitarian and Freethinker—‘The Bible is to Protestants a true idol, and they consider the worship of it, as an oracular idol, as the first condition to be a Christian.’ That was true fifty years ago. It may be true to some extent even still. But for most Protestants, whether Unitarians or still clinging to some form of orthodoxy, that idol has been effectually broken. Very few, at least, with any pretensions to Biblical

scholarship would now commit themselves to any theory of infallibility—hardly indeed even of inspiration except in the most general sense of the term. The Higher Criticism has settled that for all time, and by no possibility can that idol ever be replaced. It is surely unnecessary at this time of day to point out that this position implies no disrespect for the Bible, no want of reverence for anything or any person in the Bible worthy of our reverence. Long since Prof. Jowett startled the world, or rather the narrower section of his own church, by the announcement that you were to interpret the Bible as you would any other book. To-day this sounds a mere truism ; and we may go farther and say that honest scholarship requires that this book composed of many books, so like and unlike all other books, is not only to be interpreted, but also to be criticized, in just the same way and by just the same rules as any other book. But this admission undoubtedly gives up the Bible as an infallible guide, as the inspired Word of God, as a book having authority over the human mind and heart.

What then is the upshot? If there is no infallible Church to which to appeal in all matters of human controversy, if there is no infallible Book to guide us in all matters of faith and conduct, to tell us with authoritative voice what we must believe and what we must do, what remains but that, as Dr. Martineau so powerfully contended in his last great work, 'The Seat of Authority in Religion,' we must throw ourselves back upon Reason and Conscience as furnishing the only sure path to Truth and to God? If it is said that these are but blind guides, the answer is that they are not perfect, they are not infallible; but they are—the best we have. Neither is it the individual reason or conscience it is suggested we should trust, but the Reason and Conscience of mankind, i.e., of the most enlightened portion of the human race. If there is inspiration anywhere it is surely to be found in those affirmations of reason which have received universal assent, in those judgments of the conscience which have the sanction of the best men of all ages. The deliverances of

conscience have been called the voice of God in the soul of man. As there is a human element present, it is not claimed that they are infallible ; but the enlightened conscience of to-day is surely more trustworthy than the conscience of any Pope or church assembly, or even than that of the seers and prophets of the olden time.

We have long since inscribed on the banner of our church the three great words, TRUTH, FREEDOM, and PROGRESS. In our search for Truth no doubt we have been compelled to break some idols, to give up some beliefs, or depart from some customs once held dear. But we have never pretended to finality. We have never pledged ourselves to any creed or system of doctrine. Let us then be ever faithful to these three words. In the freedom of the spirit let us go continually forward in the quest for Truth, not doubting that if, according to Lessing's aphorism, absolute truth is for God alone, the ceaseless search for it will be to us its own great reward—let us go on, I say, in the deepest reverence towards God and the widest charity towards men.

SALVATION BY CHARACTER

‘ RIGHTEOUSNESS,’ or rightness, is the great word of the Old Testament, as ‘ Life ’ is of the New. Each interprets the other. Is a man truly and wholly alive so long as there is anything wrong about him ? And, if he is created for the very highest form of life, will not that kind of life make him ‘ a partaker of the divine nature ’ ? It will follow that the purest human rectitude, or righteousness, is of the same quality with that from which it is derived and by which it is inspired and sustained. This must be what was meant by ‘ walking with God, or having ‘ fellowship with the Father.’ But we could not be called to be pure as heaven and perfect as God, unless we were offered the means of becoming so. To acquire a God-like character, this is our blessed and only business.

If we think a little, it may grow clear to us that this subject of Salvation by Character is closely related to the themes of two former discourses—the Fatherhood and the Brotherhood. For the kind of character which makes a man safe in this universe must be such as to put him in due and orderly relations with the laws of the universe and with its whole population—the beings above and around him.

When we speak of a man of character, we mean a good character ; just as, when we call one lucky or fortunate, we mean that he has met with good luck or good fortune. When such words are used in a bad sense, we qualify them with an adjective ; and we speak of poor luck, ill fortune, bad character. Of course, the phrase ‘ Salvation by Character ’ expresses our belief that a man of good character is safe, and that all that is necessary to make him safe is that he be sound at the centre—‘ a good man,’ such as would bear the scrutiny and win the approval of the Judge of all the earth.

This is no new doctrine. It is the teach-

ing of Old Testament and New, and of all the great religions. Nothing is required by the highest law but that a man shall really be righteous, pure in his inward life, and thence pure in his outward life, like the good tree that brings forth good fruit. Easily said : is it easily done ? It may mean vastly more than at first appears.

Character, good or bad, includes the sum total of permanent qualities that go to make the man. It is what he really is, not as his neighbours see him, not as he may see himself ; but as he really is, and as he must appear to the all-knowing Searcher of hearts.

A right character, such as secures safety or salvation, must have at the centre a fixed principle, a commanding sense of right, an overmastering conviction of duty, a purpose which is to the spirit of the man what vitality is to his body, and which corresponds also to perfect health.

A recent writer says : ‘ God is a free moral agent. He can be evil if he chooses ; but he does not choose. Saints in heaven can fall if they choose ; but they have no

wish to fall. Every lost soul might repent ; but none ever will.' This writer believes that all intelligent beings are endowed with moral freedom, and that in the exercise of this freedom some become confirmed in goodness, like that of God, while others are confirmed in evil, like that of the fabled fallen angels.'

An ancient Poem of Creation tells us that the first man was tempted and fell. We have read also of a second Adam, founder of a more righteous race, who was tempted in all points, and fell not. Between these two extremes, what countless myriads have struggled and aspired, and sunk or risen, buffeting the waves, and clinging to any plank that might keep them afloat !

It is supposed that Jesus alone, of all who ever lived on this planet, could say in truth, ' I do always the things that please the Father.' If Salvation by Character depends on absolute sinlessness and there is no redemptive provision, the final harvest of souls must leave the upper heaven very thinly populated.

‘He knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust.’ He neither exacts nor expects impossibilities from his creatures. For their weaknesses, exposures, and liabilities, he is more responsible than they. There is some reluctance to amend the creed which declares that men by nature are incapable of good. But the time has gone by when we could think of the Creator (to borrow an illustration) as leaving his infant child ‘on a plank, in mid-ocean, during an equinoctial storm, and telling him to pull for the shore !’

When we talk of Salvation by Character, we are not talking of impossibilities : we are dealing with man in all his physical, mental, and moral limitations, yet as a being under considerate and just parental discipline. Perfection for such a being is a relative term. With all his imperfection, he is yet perfect in a true and reasonable sense, perfect like God when, like God, he is as good as his knowledge and power permit. But still his ideal of a higher perfection will compel him to ‘walk humbly.’

‘ A man’s reach must exceed his grasp : else what’s a heaven for ? ’ To falter through weakness, while aspiring and striving toward the best, is not to fail. The really ‘ good men ’ of whom we read were of like passions with ourselves, and confessed their follies and faults. Indeed, such confession was a part of their goodness. In this transition state, we may call any man good who, amid all his besetting infirmities and hereditary disabilities, keeps steadily, though stumblingly, to his leading purpose of fidelity to such light as is given him, under whatever sky he was born, and in whatever code of worship he has been taught. He is a good sailor who holds his rudder true, however tossed by wind and wave.

The ancient oracles do not mislead us when they divide mankind into the righteous and the wicked ; though when measured by an absolute standard, ‘ there is none righteous ; no, not one.’ It still remains true that character, such as is possible for us all, is the only basis on which we can build for happiness, welfare, or

moral safety. The clean heart and the right spirit are the only essentials, and they are not unattainable.

This idea of Salvation by Character needs to be emphasized for a quite serious reason. It is to be feared that many have been looking for salvation in the wrong direction. They have been asking, 'What will become of us?' when the more vital question is, 'What ought we to become?' They have been seeking for safety when they should have been seeking for soundness. They have been concerned to escape the consequences of sin rather than to escape from sin. This is much as if the sick man should be more anxious to be rid of pain than to be restored to health.

The traditional idea of religion needs to be clarified and rectified. When you hear that a man has become religious, what is the first thing you think of? Now he will be interested in doctrines, in ceremonies, in church life, in Sunday observance; and you suspect that his coming into the company will operate on the young people like a wet blanket. Of course, you give him

credit for trying to become a better man ; yet his religion is thought of as something non-natural—not as the awakening of his proper life, not as the orderly and rational development of the man, not as the upspringing or outflowering of a seed planted in his being, growing with his growth and nourished by influences of truth and love which are provided like summer's light and warmth.

It cannot be said that a man is right in character because his actions are right on the outside : they must be right on the inside—right in intention and motive. Many a useful action is done from policy or selfishness ; and many an act done with evil intent brings a good result. It has been said that, if a man stabs another with intent to kill, but accidentally opens an abscess and saves the life he meant to destroy, he is not less a murderer ; and we cannot even give him the credit of being a skilful surgeon.

Suppose that a man has committed some offence for which the judge has imposed a fine, and has sent him to prison till the fine

be paid. The court does not care who pays: any generous citizen can put down the money, and the prisoner will be set free. The man may be just as guilty as ever. But his legal status has been changed: the law treats him as innocent, and restores him to society. Shall we call him a 'saved' man? Yes, saved from further punishment under the law, even though he may still be a lost soul—a wanderer from the true way of life, perhaps not fit for heaven or earth—like many of his neighbours who were never convicted.

This illustrates a superficial view of salvation which has been widespread in Christendom. All mankind, we are told, are under condemnation for breaking the law of God, which requires perfect obedience and spotless purity. No soul can escape, even by future good behaviour; for the old debt stands on the books, and man has nothing to pay. God has been wronged out of so much service which was his just due; and the fiery dungeon claims its victim. Then, as if by a merciful after-thought, a scheme of salvation is brought

forward. The Son of God, who is God himself, puts on a human form, and submits to bleed and die on a cross. On account of the dignity of the victim, his sufferings are accepted as a substitute for the execution of the penalty upon the race of guilty, helpless, and doomed apostates.

God, the mighty Maker, died
For man the creature's sin.

Everlasting Justice struck the guiltless Son of
God ;
And Mercy, smiling, bade the sinner go.

With this construction the gospel is presented to mankind as a proclamation of pardon to every offender who will take advantage of the offered amnesty by putting in the plea that ' Jesus paid it all,' provided he will take in good faith an oath of future allegiance.

By this theory the moral government of the universe is simply an infinitely expanded absolute monarchy, of which every man is a rebellious subject, under sentence of endless imprisonment. What is called the plan of salvation gives the impression

of a patch to cover an unexpected rent in the moral order. The magnanimity of the Sovereign provides indeed for human redemption, and for the restoration and cleansing of sinful souls, through repentance and faith in the atoning blood. So far as this regenerative process produces personal righteousness—however clumsy the contrivance of the theologians—it falls quite into harmony with the principle of Salvation by Character.

But now mark the mischief. The imagination of mankind has seized upon the alleged fact that *the fine has been paid* and the criminal let off by merely saying, 'I accept the terms'; while the call to a life of loyalty has made no deep impression. The dramatic scene of the Crucifixion, as the supreme tragedy of history, has been portrayed thousands of times, and has melted millions of hearts. But emotion alone does not make character nor purify life. The superficial effect of such teaching on the population of Christian lands is a sad proof that a man may give full credit to the letter of gospel history, or to the

doctrine of imputed righteousness, and be no more saved from sin than the criminal is saved from guilt by being let out of jail.

The protest against this irrational and immoral perversion was needed in the interest of Christianity itself, which has suffered such a caricature. For Christianity would be inferior to Judaism if it did not teach that 'when the wicked man turneth from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live.' To confess and forsake our sins is to find mercy. When the prodigal returns a penitent, the elder brother has no need to bear the father's wrath or to suffer the penalty of transgression, in order to satisfy some theoretic demand of justice.

When the brethren say 'salvation by faith in Christ,' do they not really mean 'Salvation by Character,' or by a rectified personality? Suppose some modern rich man is convicted in conscience of making dishonest gains, and makes haste to restore or put to some rational human use that

which he has wrongfully called his own, might he not hope to hear the word of Jesus to Zaccheus, ' This day is salvation come to thy house ' ?

Suppose a soldier of the Salvation Army lays hold of a gutter drunkard—a poor hopeless wretch, lost to society, to his family, to himself ; suppose the apostle of faith, hope, and love, takes him by the hand, and says, ' In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk ! ' what is this but putting in practice the doctrine of Salvation by Character ? The whole object is to restore the fallen one to self-possession, to the proper use of his faculties, and to reinstate him in self-respect. The whole business fails unless the appeal of light and love produces a response in the mind and heart and will ; that is, unless the man is saved by the method of character.

Whether the human race has fallen from a primitive state of innocence or has never risen out of a semi-animal condition is a question on which the last word may not have been said. Those of us who accept

evolution as the historic process may yet admit that sinless innocence must have preceded any clear knowledge of the moral law, as is still true of infancy. We must also admit that, with the development of reason and conscience, all mankind have failed to conform perfectly to the perceived law of right, and thus in a very real sense have become fallen and sinful. But any man may stumble and fall, even when he is advancing along an upward path. We may, therefore, say that the sins of mankind are incidental to progress : they belong to the experience and discipline of beings imperfectly developed and imperfectly enlightened. We may still believe that the Creator is not disappointed in the outcome of his work and has not repented that he made man upon earth.

We must look in the face the tragic facts of sin, suffering, and retribution ; for we all know them to be real from personal experience, observation, and history. They are not to be winked out of sight nor belittled.

But there is another and greater fact of

which we also know something : ‘ *There is plenteous redemption.*’ There is ample provision for the fallen to rise and the sinful to be saved. Even the Mohammedans—who simply echo Christianity—say that ‘ Islam is possible to every soul ’ ; that is, none are so low that they may not rise, or so bad that they may not become good. *There is salvation to the uttermost ; and it is by the way of character.* The curative power which heals our bodily hurts is busy with our deeper disorders.

But even the good man walks amid serious perils. The physicians warn us that a weak or sore spot, or a functional disorder of stomach, brain, or any organ, is not to be treated as merely local ; that it may be only a symptom of some general ill condition, like impure blood or nerve-exhaustion. They prescribe ‘ constitutional treatment,’ a systematic building up. If the whole vital tone is low, the weakest part may be the first to give way ; and this may be the only part which we accuse of failure. But there is no complete health until we are clean and sound all through.

And if any part is sick, every part may be impaired, either as a cause or as a consequence.

The body is never in fine running order or fullest force for work or resistance, unless it is rightly adjusted to the larger world of which it is a part, and in which it lives and moves and has its being. The mighty energies that are in the air and light, in heat, electricity, and chemical agency, all play through and through these physical frames of ours ; and, if we are in harmony with them, they are ministers of life, strength, and gladness. But if we break or mar our connexions, these very forces will slay us or become our tormentors. Try what the beautiful fairy sun-ray will do to the inflamed eye, or what the purest air will do to the sick lung, or what wholesome food will do to the outraged and disabled stomach.

Let all this pass for a spiritual parable. Man does not live by the physical elements and forces alone. He lives by receiving and appropriating the fine and subtle influences of truth and love, which flow to him

from the Lord and Giver of life. His moral energy is measured by his receptivity. His receptivity depends on use ; for he can take in only as he gives out. Both getting and giving depend on his keeping in harmony with the larger spiritual order to which he belongs—in harmony with the higher Spirit and all the open channels of communication through nature or grace ; in harmony with the laws which are at once his guides and protectors and their own avengers ; in harmony with humanity, by preserving in himself the spirit of loving goodwill and ready service, quite regardless of the attitude or animus of men toward himself.

‘ Do not impair the life-principle,’ said Napoleon to the physician. Character means moral vitality. To be indifferent or to parley with inferior standards threatens us with heart-failure. Our most common weaknesses spring from a sneaking desire to serve two masters—to be ‘ about right,’ and yet to avoid self-denial, to secure pleasure or profit that can only be had by some secret bargain with Satan. Just as we wish for bodily health yet weakly remain

in bondage to the appetites and habits that invite disease.

Character is built up strongly by continuous discipline, by holding ourselves habitually to the best standards, by availing ourselves of the helps and opportunities which are set down in the programme of every day and every situation. Self-indulgence, negligence, or over-confidence, is fatal. The student who sees little value and feels little interest in books and instruction, for whom learning has only moderate attraction, and who catches no breath of inspiration from the college atmosphere and the emulation of intellectual comradeship, will probably go out as foolish as he went in. With suitable changes, the same formula may be filled out for every man and woman on earth. To be careless is to be characterless.

We may now see in clearer light the value of all 'means of grace,' or helps to improvement. No man can lift himself to higher moral conditions by sheer force of good resolutions. The bird does not rise alone by wings; there must be air. The

mountain-climber must find at every step a place for his foot. And the human mind does not work in a void. In trying to think, it must think of something. The affections must clasp an object, actual or ideal. The will must be moved by some motive beyond mere willing ; and its emotions must not waste themselves in aimless agitation.

In short, we make no gain in wisdom or in goodness—no advance in character—unless we put ourselves in relation and contact with the three worlds of which we are a part : with the world of nature, humanity, and God ; with the realities of life which concern us, as thinking, loving, and acting beings. Character is not built out of nothing. Its foundation and superstructure require solid material, just as every tissue of our bodies must be packed with actual substance.

The test of character is fitness to the environment, the ability to live well in all circumstances, and especially the fitness for social adjustments. Can we live with other imperfect human beings usefully and happily, ready and willing both to give and

to take such benefits and burdens as belong to the situation ?

The environment also helps to make character. Every contact with men and things leaves its mark upon us. Our bodies are subject to a tremendous pressure from the atmosphere—fourteen pounds to the square inch, the books tell us ; yet we are not only able to bear this pressure, we really find our life in the air, and enjoy every breath. The pressure from within balances that from without. There is a mightier social pressure ; and we need to be fitted both to resist it and to profit by it.

Much of this pressure takes the form of temptation—a game we can all play at. We tempt and are tempted. Every word, look, or action, takes effect : we give each other our worst or our best. How much we need that central force of principle which makes it safe for us to be together !

To what influences and forces from without may we safely yield ? Ah, we can quickly tell ! We have learned by glad and sad experiences that in some companionships we are exalted and refined, in

others we are depressed and coarsened. Yet it is not the companionship that helps or hurts : it is our way of taking it. We shall miss the benefit of the best if we are unreceptive : we shall take no harm from the worst if we are inwardly protected. Character is its own shield, its own anti-septic. The wise and good select by a kind of affinity or unerring instinct the things that are in harmony with wisdom and goodness ; and they reject the rest as a healthy taste rejects what is ugly or rotten.

Character never needs vindication : it is its own defence. If there should be a burglary in Roxbury, would anybody charge it to Edward Everett Hale ? If the White House should be set on fire, would the detectives suspect Theodore Roosevelt ? Yet so confused are the elements of this human world that the purest and best of men have been falsely accused and sent to the dungeon, the scaffold, the cross. Even thus, in the long run, character holds its own.

The hooting mob of yesterday with silent awe
return

To gather up the ashes into history's golden urn.

The earth-life is a school of character, and it is worth our while to take the whole course of study and training. Some say, 'The sooner we are fit to become all spirit the better.' This opens the door to mischief. We have no right to disparage our bodies or our physical surroundings. Every man is an animal, with some modern improvements: a superior animal he should be by virtue of his psychical outfit.

And flesh helps soul, now, much as soul helps flesh.

Body and mind belong together at every stage of the present life—in education, industry, morals, religion. Complete character must take in the whole man. What death may do for us is none of our concern. We shall have our hands full if we mind our present business. To live wisely and thoroughly to-day cannot hurt our prospects for any possible to-morrow.

Yet, it may be, we are just now in danger of lowering our ideal through reaction from the excessive emphasis, which has been put upon mental development. We have been producing big heads, thin chests, dyspep-

tics, neurotics, and consumers of patent medicines. The pendulum swings the other way ; and there is some contempt for weaklings, and admiration for feats of strength in the arena and prowess in the world of conflict.

There is growing demand for more outdoor life, deeper draughts of air, plenty of sunshine, and free play of muscle ; in short, for a return to whatever was good in the free life of savages. All this will count for a better basis of character, unless we revive also some of the less lovely aspects of savage life, and lose the costly gains of refinement and a higher humanity. 'I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection,' says the apostle ; or, as a little maiden puts it, 'we must keep the soul on the top.'

This supremacy of the higher nature is just what we mean by character and by salvation. Give us this supremacy, and all the forces of modern life may safely be directed to making the earth more fit for human uses as a home, a school, and a temple. There will be room for a noble

worldly-mindedness ; and we shall not be exhorted to leave business and attend to religion, but rather to attend religiously to business.

The millions of men and women in the world are said to be worth so much money. Is *that* all ? So much manhood as there is, so much worth there is. Emerson calls men of character 'the conscience of society.' They admonish and restrain and inspire us all. The real wealth of the country is in the people who cannot lie, who will not steal, and who cannot be bought by any bribe offered to their self-love or their interest. The real poverty of the country is in that part of the population, learned or ignorant, high or low, who lack character, whose spirits go up and down with the weather and the markets, who are on the hunt for spectacles and sensations, who can find no good use for solitude, who put out their thinking to be done by the preacher, the political leader, or the journalist, and whom any wind can pick up and sweep along as it does the litter of the streets.

There is one kind of character about

which we all think alike : it is open as the day because it has nothing to hide. It combines the boldness of the lion with the gentleness of the lamb. It is rooted and grounded in love. ' It suffers long and is kind ; it envieth not ; vaunteth not itself ; is not puffed up ; doth not behave itself unseemly ; seeketh not its own ; is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.' It is ready for every good word and work, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. It is not overcome of evil, but overcomes evil with good. We do not forget in what school we formed this ideal.

As we can have nothing better for our bodies than perfect health, so we need nothing for our souls but right character. But, as we have seen, it is not a light matter nor to be cheaply bought in any market. It costs everything else, and is worth all it costs. It is the product of all the finest forces of the universe—a result of the long, steady working together of the Divine Spirit with the human. God alone

never made a good man, as he never made a good book. Man alone never made himself good, as he never made his heart beat or his brain think. They must work together.

Right character is simply the result of habitually choosing what is seen to be morally the best. A steady traveller along the right road reaches his destination. Any man who will do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God—taking no glory to himself, but always ready for orders—will be like the wise man who builds his house on the rock. He is helping all the time to make good society on earth ; he is fitting himself all the time, without much concern about it, for the best society in the universe—for the company of the spirits of the just, made perfect. For it must for ever be true that ‘ no honest mind is without communion with God,’ and that an honest man is his noblest work, the crowning glory of his Creation.

THE PROPHETS OF ISRAEL AS SOCIAL REFORMERS

THE prophets of Israel were reformers in the best sense of the word, leaders in the nation's progress. Their career is instructive for us just because social progress in Israel moved along the same lines as social progress elsewhere. From the single example we may learn the general law. This truth has not always been realized and it is not everywhere recognized to-day. The Jewish people believed that the history of their nation, so far from being similar to that of other nations, was entirely exceptional. Their theory is visibly set forth in the order of books in the Old Testament, which places a complete and perfect constitution, divinely given, at the very beginning of the nation's life. According to this theory, the divine Providence passed

by the bulk of mankind and made Israel the direct and immediate object of its care. A perfect system of law was revealed to Moses at Sinai, so perfect that there could be no progress—all that the nation could ever do was to strive after conformity to this model. Throughout the centuries the divine care was exercised on this nation in a miraculous manner with the object of securing conformity to this model. The prophets then were simply preachers, expounders of the written word given long before. The history of the people presented itself as a series of backslidings and revivals in rhythmical succession. After each declension there was a return, more or less complete, to the Pentateuchal model.

Now if this theory (which is that of the latest of the Old Testament books) were true, it is clear that the history of Israel could give us no instruction. It would only tell us how God was pleased to act in one particular and exceptional case; how he acts in the education of the rest of mankind would still be unknown. But this—his method with mankind in general—is

what most concerns us. What we seek is the law of progress, but as we have seen, the Jewish theory leaves no room for progress. The culmination of history was reached with Moses three thousand years ago. To be sure the Church in adopting this theory modified it in one important particular; it made the whole Mosaic dispensation a temporary one—an episode preparatory to the coming of Christ, something to be swept away at his advent. That this does violence to the claims of the Levitical legislation itself need not now trouble us. What we need to notice is that in this case also—that is, on the Christian theory—the history of Israel has no real lesson for us—it stands apart from the general history of mankind, an exception to all rules, a miracle which tells us nothing of God's usual way of dealing with his children.

It is a distinct advantage then which the modern critical study of the Old Testament gives us when it removes the history of Israel from the isolation in which it stood until recent times. This history thereby

becomes intelligible. For when we look at it soberly, Israel's view of its own history is unintelligible. That a nation should receive a constitution which is to be unchangeable for all time, that this constitution (which be it remembered contained minute and detailed directions for the conduct of life) should actually be preserved without amendment for fifteen hundred years, that nevertheless the nation should persistently ignore its most important provisions until the very close of the period I have named—this is so contrary to experience that it is rightly described as unintelligible. Outside the realm of Israel, the law of history is change and progress. To convince us that the contrary was the case in Israel would take the most irrefragable evidence. But critical study shows that the evidence is not irrefragable. The Hebrew documents themselves, when rightly read, testify against their own latest editors. So far from Israel being an exception to the rule of progress, it is one of the most conspicuous examples of the rule. The Mosaic

age, instead of giving Israel a complete set of laws, gave it only the germs of civil and religious institutions. From that germinal stage the history of Israel was a growth—a movement forward. As in the case of other nations, this movement was not regular and uniform; there were periods of stagnation and even of retrogression; the current had its pools and eddies. But, taken as a whole, there was growth, and the law was the law of progress.

What especially interests us here is the position which the new reading gives to the *prophets*. These men now become the organs of progress and take a leading part in the drama, whereas, according to the traditional theory, they were quite subordinate—that is, they were only expounders of the written law. In the scheme of declension and revival, they may find a place as the active means of revival. But the mission of a preacher who is merely the exponent of a written code gives little scope for originality. For this reason, as I say, the traditional theory makes the prophets quite subordinate. If

we accept this theory, we might pass them by without notice, but at the same time we should do violence to the testimony of the prophets themselves. For, if there is one thing which stands out in the words of the prophets, it is that they make no appeal to a written authority. A code is something unknown to them. And if we look a little further, we discover not only that they were ignorant of the Mosaic code, but that their attitude towards the things fundamental to the Mosaic code precludes their acquaintance with it. If they were set to expound the Law, we can only wonder that they did their work so badly. What the Law needs is a set of scribes, casuists, rabbis, bound to the letter. The prophets were not in this class, and we may apply to them the words spoken of one greater than they—they spoke as having authority and not as the scribes.

While the Jewish view that the prophets were mere expounders of the Law was never fully adopted in the Christian Church, another view has widely prevailed which we may call equally untenable. This is

the view which makes of the prophets primarily revealers of a system of truth, a theory of the universe. Instead of being scribes after the manner of Gamaliel or Akiba, they are supposed to have been theologians like Thomas Aquinas or Calvin. But here again the theory is contradicted by the writings of the prophets themselves. Certain truths concerning God, man, and the world, they no doubt held. But they nowhere set these forth in orderly form, much less do they maintain that the acceptance of these truths is what they demand from their hearers. Their interest is practical rather than speculative; the wrongs they denounce are wrong acts rather than wrong beliefs. The thought that God had given into their keeping an intellectual system of philosophy which men must accept on peril of damnation seems never to have occurred to them. It is perhaps not too much to say that the thought would have been incomprehensible to them. As to the few and simple truths which underlay their preaching, we may say these were assumed as axioms rather

than traced to a special revelation. The prophets appealed to their contemporaries on the ground of beliefs common to all reflecting men. That God is the God of Israel and that Israel is his people had been held from the earliest times. One point alone was more sharply defined by the prophets—that God is a God of justice and that he will deal justly with Israel. Even this (thus abstractly stated) was no doubt the belief of the people. Where the prophets differed was in the practical application of this belief. And when we look for further and more specific theological propositions in the writings of the prophets, they are conspicuous by their absence. In this respect also the modern critical theory has helped us to a truer apprehension of the prophetic mission. By disengaging the words of the prophets from the words of their later editors, it has set these words in their proper light. We now see the men as they lived and moved among their contemporaries, dealing with living questions and dealing with them in the most practical way.

And we may add that the modern critical view allows us to correct another theory which is at least one-sided. The Christian Church was naturally led from the first to emphasize the predictive function of the prophets. To them Judaism was a preparation for Christianity and found its full significance in that fact. How this came about we easily see. In important respects Christianity is the fulfilment of Judaism. Christ and the Apostles were conscious that the foundations on which they built were laid by the prophets and psalmists. Christianity cannot be understood without a thorough understanding of Judaism. It was a right instinct therefore which led the early Christians to find Christ in the Old Testament. But we often lose sight of the fact that they found the gospel in Plato also. If Christianity cannot be understood without a thorough study of Judaism, it is becoming more and more plain that it cannot be understood without a thorough study of Hellenism. It should be clear that this recognition of the preparatory nature of Judaism does

not warrant us in making the predictive function of the prophets their chief function. No doubt their faces were turned towards the future; no doubt they saw more clearly than their contemporaries what was inevitably coming upon their nation. But this is true of other reformers also—their consciousness of the defects of the present sharpens their prevision. But in both cases it is the *living issues of the present* which absorb the interest of the leader and call forth his activity. To picture the prophets as seers or sibyls, rapt out of themselves, unconscious of the present, oblivious of everyday issues, is to make them just what they were not. They spoke and wrote as men who sought to influence their contemporaries. Their message was: Turn from the evil of your ways; turn now, turn here. Seek truth and righteousness to-day; now is the time of acceptance, now is the day of salvation.

If we have justified ourselves in classing the prophets of Israel with the reformers of other nations, let us notice how fully their activity answers to this definition. There

are certain features that appear in all the forward movements of society so regularly that we may call them constant phenomena. First of all there is the conviction that, at any particular period, all is not as it should be—there are wrongs to be righted, defects to be remedied, abuses to be corrected. Of all the obstacles to progress none is so fatal as the self-satisfied conviction that all is going well. The denunciation of Jeremiah against those who say peace, peace, when it is not peace—who say all is well when all is not well—is easily intelligible, for these false teachers are like the quack doctor who lulls the patient to security by assuring him he is getting well when in fact the disease is eating into a vital part. So in the nation the smooth-mouthed demagogue who flatters the people by assuring them that theirs is the most perfect state, that they have achieved freedom and prosperity, is the real enemy of progress. It is for this reason that we should esteem even a pessimistic critic. He may be wrong, he may paint his picture in colours too dark. But at any rate he does

not flatter. It is with communities as it is with individuals—the self-righteous man is the man incapable of improvement. The publican who knows his sinfulness is a much more hopeful case than the Pharisee who recites the list of his good deeds. Now at heart we all desire progress. No one of us believes that his church, his community, has reached perfection. To say that these are good enough for us is to stultify ourselves—they ought not to be good enough for us if they can in any way be made better. There is always room for the reformer, and the reformer must begin by crying out at the evils of the present state.

It is in the nature of the case now that the reformer should first be in the minority, and it is not strange that he should be driven by this fact to extreme statements. In his endeavour to make others see the evils to which they are blind, he may exaggerate those evils. It is not unusual therefore to find the pioneers of reform pessimistic in their outlook. The early Abolitionists were accused of using intemperate language. They were sure that

no slave-holder could be a Christian, and they predicted that this country would be destroyed unless slavery were immediately abolished. Carlyle did less than justice to his contemporaries when he lumped them together as mostly fools, and Carlyle, as we know, had gloomy anticipations for the future of civilization. Yet the early Abolitionists were pioneers of a great reform, and Carlyle was a health-giving force in his outspoken denunciation of shams. Even so extreme an opponent of the existing order as Nietzsche may be a prophet for us if he leads us seriously to consider the meaning of evolution for the individual and for the race. Passionate denunciation of the current optimism by a solitary thinker is usually the first step to the discovery and removal of social evils.

It is worthy of notice that this discovery and denunciation of social evils is often based upon an idealistic view of the past. A Hebrew writer deprecates comparison of past and present, advising us not to inquire wherein former days were better than these.

By his very admonition he testifies that among the Hebrews as elsewhere such comparison was habitual. Distance in time throws a glamour over the scene as well as distance in space. This tendency to idealize the past is seen in almost all reformers. Luther found the golden age of the Church in the past ; Rousseau urged a return to the state of nature ; Carlyle opposed the self-righteousness of his time by magnifying the advantages of medieval institutions ; and Nietzsche in his demand for the ruthless application of the law of survival saw in savage man a prototype of the superman. Men find their golden age either in the past or in the future. The cry for reform may be an exhortation to move forward towards the good time coming, or it may be, perhaps more often it is, an exhortation to revive the good old days from which we have degenerated.

Let us note again that every important reform comes by conflict. We have already seen that reform begins with a minority, usually with a single man. So long as he is only a voice crying in the

wilderness or so long as the minority is small in numbers, there may be no conflict—the movement may be treated as a negligible quantity. But the truth has power to make converts. As the reforming party grows, it arouses the fears of vested interests, and active persecution follows. The cause begins to have its martyrs, and when it begins to have martyrs there is hope of its success.

But here again we have something to learn. Very few reforms triumph in the sense in which their first advocates desire their triumph. The blood of the martyrs is indeed the seed of the Church, but the Church which springs from the blood of the martyrs is often a very different Church from the one of which the martyrs themselves dreamed. Human nature seems born to compromise, and great movements are influenced by a variety of forces. When the reform which has been advocated by a minority becomes the programme of the majority, it is modified to suit the ideas of the majority. Nor is this altogether to be regretted. A violent break with the past

is not always desirable, and certainly is not often practicable. We must build on foundations already laid, and if the new structure thereby loses in symmetry it may gain in solidity. The old traditions live on in the new constitution, to give rise perhaps to a new demand for reform and so to occasion a new forward movement.

I have thus sketched in outline the course which human reform movements naturally run. They begin with one or more critics, perhaps pessimistic critics, of the existing state of things ; they are based on an idealistic view of the past ; they meet opposition, and if they triumph they triumph by conflict ; and in the process of conflict they are modified, diluted, or adulterated, so that they succeed at last by compromise. We shall now see how completely the history of the prophetic reform in Israel agrees with this scheme. So far as we can trace it, this reform began with Elijah—a solitary figure moved to passionate protest against the Phœnician Baal ; pessimistic also, if we may judge

by his protest at Horeb—‘ I alone remain, and they seek my life.’ What his protest meant became only too evident when his party came into power and turned the sword without mercy on the adherents of Baal. It speaks much for the personality of the prophet that his programme was carried through so soon. It seems to have been one of the rare cases where a strong and overmastering will sweeps all before it. So far as we can see, it was not a case in which compromise played a part. But the violence of the revolution shows that something more than purely religious motives were in play, and the means used were condemned by Elijah’s own successors.

It is of special interest now to notice that Elijah’s reform was based on an idealization of the past. Himself a child of the desert, he found Israel’s golden age in the time of the wilderness sojourn. There was perhaps more reason for this idealization in the case of Israel than there is in the case of some other nations. The tribes which came into Canaan were doubtless possessed of the virtues of the nomad

life. The desert dweller has always been characterized by courage, by a strong sense of kinship, by willingness to sacrifice himself for the good of the clan, by hospitality, and by uncomplaining endurance of hardship. The virtues of the Hebrews at this stage of their culture were not unlike those of the American Indians before contact with civilization. In one case as in the other, contact with civilization was followed by degeneracy in these characteristic traits. In taking possession of Canaan the Hebrews adopted a richer culture and a more ornate ritual. The influence upon them was not unlike the effect of suddenly acquired wealth on a man whose early life has been passed in poverty. In too many cases the man is ruined by his wealth ; increased means of gratification stimulate the desires hitherto held in check ; dissipation follows, and the man becomes the victim of his own passions. So it may be with nations, and to a certain extent it must have been so in Israel. The sterner virtues of the desert were no longer exercised in the enervating

atmosphere of Canaanitish culture. To this extent we shall find reason in the prophetic denunciations of Israel's sinfulness. But the prophets would have been more than human if in looking back at the good old days they had not idealized them, exaggerating the virtues and minimizing the vices of their ancestors.

In the pessimism with which they viewed the present and in idealization of the past, all the earlier prophets agreed with Elijah. Of Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah, we may affirm this with certainty; of Isaiah it is true with some reservation. Where they differed from Elijah and his school was in abjuring political methods. Amos and Hosea saw with correct intuition that in face of the overwhelming power of Assyria the petty politics of Israel could not avail. For this very reason their pessimism was so pronounced. Their religious faith is indisputable—its strength is seen in the tenacity with which they affirm that the dreaded Assyrian is the instrument of Israel's own God employed for the punishment of his people. That it is always

right to do right, that the divine favour may be secured by letting justice flow on like a river and righteousness like a mighty stream, is their clear conviction. But they see no reason to believe that their people will take this message to heart. In some of his utterances Isaiah takes the same position — the prophetic message only hardens the hearers, makes their minds sluggish, closes their ears, blinds their eyes. And, a century later still, Jeremiah is of the same mind: 'How can you do good who have trained yourselves to do evil?'—this is perhaps his most characteristic utterance. And in him also we see with great distinctness the idealization of the past. He compares the days of the desert sojourn to the days of first wedded love, when the accord between bride and groom is perfect. Such had been the early relation between Yahweh and Israel, to be followed so soon by sad and remediless defection.

A question might be raised here, whether we are right in calling these men reformers. For one thing they proposed no definite

measures of reconstruction in State or Church, and for another they were so much occupied with the thought of God that we might suppose human reforms a matter of indifference to them. They seem sometimes to exult in the conviction that a visitation is coming 'on all that is high and lifted up, on all cedars of Lebanon and all oaks of Bashan, on all lofty towers and all flaunting banners; and the pride of man shall be abased and the loftiness of man shall be brought low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.' Can the man rightly be called a reformer who simply predicts a judgment of God which will destroy all on which men have set their hearts? To this the answer is obvious: These men were reformers because they felt the call to preach. If like Jonah they had retired to some secluded arbour whence they could watch the coming of the storm, we might question their title. But when they were impelled to utter a warning there must have been in their hearts a hope that some hearers would profit by their words. And this is confirmed by the

standard which they evidently had in mind. What they declared was the very simple message that the wrath of God rested on the nation because of moral dereliction. But the moral dereliction of the nation is simply the sum of the transgressions of its individual members. The prophets always assume that men know what the moral law is and that they are able to obey it. The reform that they demanded was always practicable, and the preacher in demanding it was a real reformer. In fact, there is evidence that they made some converts—Isaiah had a group of disciples, Jeremiah had a few friends who stood by him in the time of trouble.

At the same time it must be confessed that the programme of a general reformation left many questions unanswered. There was the always troublesome question of vested interests. The prophets had not hesitated to point out that the moral condition of the people was due to the corruption of the leading classes. King, nobles, judges, priests, and prophets, all fell under their condemnation. And the

institutions which these men represented or which gave them their place in the community equally met with reprobation. Not only was the King bad, the kingship itself was a defection ; not only were the priests wicked, the whole popular religion ministered to vice. We can hardly wonder that those who denounced the whole framework of Church and State should be regarded as madmen as they often were, or persecuted as traitors as some of them were. The forces arrayed against them were so powerful that we may doubt whether their programme could have been carried out without modification. As we have already seen, this is the law of progress. The demands of the reformers are usually toned down by practical men and the result is a compromise. In Judaism the compromise is embodied for us in the book of Deuteronomy.

No more striking event is on record in the long history of Israel than the finding of this book in the temple in the reign of Josiah. Doubt has been thrown on the accuracy of the account in our hands, and

in minor details this account may have been coloured by later theories. But there seems no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of the narrative. The young and impressionable King was prepared to do what was for the good of his kingdom, and suddenly a definite programme of reform was set before him in black and white, couched in language which even yet impresses us by its eloquence. It was the definiteness of the programme which made it effective, in contrast with the somewhat vague denunciations of the prophets. At the same time the fundamental demand of the book was the demand for social righteousness which the prophets had long been emphasizing. Where the author differed from the prophets was in the skill with which he took up into his scheme all that he thought worth saving from the existing social order. The book then represents the compromise by which as we have seen a new movement usually succeeds.

As evidence of the writer's skill, we may notice first the way in which he brings to his support the great name of Moses.

Tradition had connected the social and religious institutions of Israel with this first of the prophets and by emphasizing this tradition, the author proved that he was no ruthless innovator. The prophets' idealization of the past was thus put into concrete shape and the new state of things was avowedly built upon ancient foundations.

But more conclusive is the way in which the author combines the apparently conflicting claims of prophets and priests. The earlier prophets had rejected the popular religion wholly. No more severe denunciations are found anywhere than those pronounced by Amos and Hosea against the cultus, the priesthood, and the sanctuaries. So far as we can make out, these men would have abolished the ritual altogether. When they declared that Yahweh demands not sacrifice, but kindness, they meant that the one thing needful is justice and humanity between man and man. Isaiah seems to have been of their mind, for instead of offering sacrifice he would have men cease to do evil and learn to do well,

to seek righteousness, relieve the oppressed, plead for the fatherless, judge the cause of the widow. If, as we have reason to suppose, Isaiah believed the temple to be God's dwelling-place, he did not suppose that it must be maintained by sacrifices and offerings.

But a temple without these would afford poor support for its ministers. The prophetic demand for abolition of ritual arrayed against itself a powerful caste, attacked vested interests as we should say. At the same time the need of some reform was so evident that the more thoughtful of the priests themselves saw it. Their position may be compared to that of some of the English bishops at the time of the Reformation—they would not be averse to a purification of the Church if only their own powers and emoluments were untouched. The Jerusalem priests were not unwilling that the country sanctuaries should be abolished, if only the temple was not interfered with.

It is this interest which the Deuteronomist conserved when he made one

sanctuary alone legitimate for Israel, and when he insisted on the continuance of tithes, first-fruits, and offerings for this sanctuary. In adopting this course, he apparently took advantage of the ancient enmity between Israelites and Canaanites. He stigmatized the country sanctuaries as places of Canaanitish worship. In this he had the precedent of Hosea, and was guided by a correct historic sense. For in fact, as we have seen, the early religion of Israel was free from the luxury and licence of a later time—these came in with the adoption of Canaanitish customs. From this point of view we may understand, if we do not excuse, the ferocity with which the author commands the extermination of all Canaanitish customs. He was endeavouring to enlist pure-blooded Israelite feeling on the side of his reform.

One thing more we must notice as evidence of the practical spirit of this writer. This is the sharpness with which he formulates the doctrine of rewards and punishments. It is and must be the theory of all religions that obedience to God brings

happiness and that disobedience is punished. The prophets of whom we have spoken held this view, and they got it from their predecessors. The earliest Israelite writers show us in the lives of the patriarchs how God protects and prospers those who are devoted to him. The whole preaching of the prophets may be summed up in the proposition: Israel has done wrong and must therefore suffer. But it was left for the Deuteronomist to formulate this theory in its most definite and I may say its crassest form. This writer specifically declares that if Israel does not obey the law laid down in his book, the nation will suffer defeat at the hand of its enemies, the crops will be afflicted with drought and mildew, the people will suffer from all the diseases of Egypt. On the other hand, if the people obey, they will be victorious over their enemies, the land will yield bountiful harvests, the people will have health and wealth and every material good. By this method of statement the author not only made his programme definite—he enlisted in its favour

the most powerful motive which the average man can understand.

We find then in this book an illustration of the way in which reforms succeed. It built on a foundation already laid, conserving the *status quo* so far as might be ; by compromise at an important point it secured the support of a powerful party in the State ; it made its demands definite and specific ; and it held out a concrete scheme of reward and penalty. It may be said to have brought the demands of the prophets into the sphere of practical politics, but in doing this it moderated those demands and deprived them of the idealism which is to us their chief charm. It is doubtful whether the prophets themselves would have been satisfied with this programme, and there is reason to suppose that Jeremiah looked with distrust both upon the book and upon the movement to which it gave rise. We may suppose him to have felt by a correct instinct that the attempt to put the work of the Spirit into a book deprived it of spontaneity and opened the way to formalism.

Although this compromise, as I have called it, fell far short of the prophetic ideal, we must recognize that it was a real step in advance and that, humanly speaking, it was the most that could be secured at the time. Even this mediating programme was very imperfectly carried out. The days of its apparent triumph were few and the triumph was succeeded by a decided reaction. Things sank back into the old groove and might have remained so had not the catastrophe of the exile supervened. By this catastrophe the best part of the nation was torn from its abiding place, the bonds which connected the exiles with their past were violently severed, and on foreign soil they were obliged to organize their little community as best they could on new lines. Among the things that they brought with them was the book which had so impressively denounced their punishment. No wonder that this book furnished the plan on which they reconstituted their little community. The words of the prophets had come true. Calamity had fallen on the nation. The only hope of the rem-

nant was in obedience to the law which their fathers had violated.

Revolutions never go backward, and we are not surprised that the leader who guided this reconstruction, although he took the Deuteronomic point of view, advanced farther in the path laid down by this book. Rather I should say in one of the paths laid down in this book, for it was the priestly tendency which now strongly asserted itself. The moral and spiritual leader of the exiles was Ezekiel and his priestly descent and training had large influence on his preaching. Some have even denied him the name of prophet because of his saturation with priestly ideas. But this is going too far—in his moral earnestness, in his religious faith, and in the zeal with which he preached to his contemporaries he was not behind the chiefest of the prophets, and among them all none was more influential than he. In the first or denunciatory half of his career, he simply repeated the threats of his predecessors. His originality comes out in the second and constructive period of his activity. Here

he takes up and expands the priestly ideal of Deuteronomy, interweaving with it traditions preserved in the guild to which he belonged. The Deuteronomist makes the temple the one place of worship for Israel; Ezekiel makes it the centre and sanctuary of the whole world. The Deuteronomist commands tithes and offerings as signs of Israel's obedience; Ezekiel makes the whole national life consist in guardianship of the temple and due performance of the ritual. The point of view of the older prophets seems wholly lost. Ritual and morality are no longer contrasted, ritual condemned and morality exalted; ritual is exalted and morality, we may say, is merged in it. Ezekiel's moral earnestness admits of no question. He adopts with all his heart the ethical standard of his predecessors. But violation of this standard shocks him not because it is an offence against common humanity—rather it is a ritual defilement, a transgression against the sanctity which should characterize the special people of God.

With Ezekiel the movement we have

been studying reached its culmination, for later Judaism only made more definite and rigid the scheme laid down by this prophet. Looking back over the ground we have traversed, we see the idealism of the earlier prophets succeeded by the Deuteronomic compromise and that in turn superseded by the ritualism we have just been considering. At first we are inclined to doubt whether there is real progress here and to ask ourselves whether the work of the prophets has not been in vain. But in answering this question, we should remember that the moral ideas of the earlier prophets were really taken up into the later ritualism. We should remember moreover that humanly speaking the hard crust of ritualism was necessary to protect the moral ideas of Judaism in their conflict with a hostile world. This rigid system no doubt became in time an obstacle to further progress. But this only shows that the work of reform is never done—each stage of advance becomes in its turn the starting-point of new development.

Fundamentally we are at one with the

prophets in the impulse by which we are moved—for what stirred them was a deep sense of the evils of their time. We may be more definite and say that what moved them was a deep sympathy with suffering humanity. They were indignant at man's inhumanity to man. The cry of the widow and the fatherless came into their ears and they broke out into objurgations against injustice and oppression. In this they were at one with reformers of all ages and there is no reason to suppose that this movement of sympathy will ever become exhausted. In the rebuke of social wrongs, we are building on the foundation of the prophets and apostles.

If we are faithful to our opportunity, we must be at one with the prophets in the sincerity and directness of their method. It is true that on some points we cannot be as positive as they. The complexity of the universe and the multiplicity of its problems are very much more visible to us than to them. It is enormously more difficult to form and hold convictions to-day than it was in the comparatively simple

world of twenty-five hundred years ago. Yet this does not diminish the obligation upon us to put into clear language every conviction that we have. The prophets of Israel set us an example of directness and courage which should stimulate us to similar activity.

And if it be asked whether there is no point in which we differ from these preachers of long ago, I shall reply that we differ in the *scientific point of view*. Amos, Hosea, and their successors saw in the course of nature the direct action of Yahweh, the divine will accomplishing its sovereign pleasure, miraculous, arbitrary perhaps, mysterious. We have learned that in nature and in human society there is an ordered sequence, whose stages we can follow and whose laws we can formulate. By careful observation of facts, we shall be in possession of these social laws and shall be better able to direct social forces.

The forces with which we have to deal are both individual and social. The perfect society will be one in which each member of society strives after perfection.

The prophet is the organ by which society progresses. It is his to lead in a noble emulation. To do this effectively, he must be able to bring motives to bear on the men to whom he speaks. Hence the importance of psychological study. It is not an accident that the psychology of religion is receiving so much attention to-day. We have discovered afresh, one might almost say, that religion is the great motive force. Like other great motive forces, it may be controlled and applied by him who understands it.

And what is true of the individual is true of the great organism of which the individual is a part. The prophet, in stimulating and guiding individuals to perfection, is leading a great social forward movement. It is only as society is in motion that it is healthy. The mark of life is activity. Progress cannot stop; that which has value is not the possession of any good but the pursuit of it.

GOD, THE UNIVERSE, AND MAN

IN the *Hibbert Journal* (January, 1908), it was stated by Sir Oliver Lodge, that life is neither matter nor energy, but is a guiding and directing principle.

That is to say : it utilizes matter and force ; dominates the form through which it expresses itself ; is beneath and behind the first movement in a seed ; causes *this* to become an ear of wheat, *that* a mighty oak. It is the principle embodied in the human cell, impelling the mechanism of that marvellous speck to differentiate, develop, select, control, use, and reject, until on the face of God's fair earth there walks a man who, though his body through all his years changes without cessation, yet retains his identity as an individual.

That guiding principle we see at work everywhere—in the blade of grass right up to man's self-consciousness. Many its manifestations but one its nature. Spencer calls it the Infinite and Eternal Energy ; he tells us that it wells up in us in the form of consciousness. That is, he affirms a vital relationship between the Ultimate that we, in religion, call God, and man.

Martineau pointed out that just as Spencer said his 'Unknowable'—this Energy, Infinite and Eternal—was more akin to spirit than to matter, so was it, in reality, Mind ; and that through reason we could learn God's ways, and through our moral nature arrive at his Righteousness.

Whatsoever God may be ; whatsoever he may will ; whatsoever passes in the universe, in starlit heaven or on bedewed earth ; whatever has been, is, or will be ; so far as of these things we can know, all such knowledge is ours because we are self-conscious beings.

It has, however, been fiercely contended in the past, and yet is by many, but by a rapidly diminishing minority—lingering

still in the streets where theories of life, exploded years ago, are voiced by intellectual laggards—it has been contended that our consciousness is only the product of experience ; merely animated matter that is able to think because it has passed through a long process of external sensations—thought has been tickled into existence. But no infinity of sensations can produce that which is able to turn sensations into *knowledge* of sensations. The product of experience cannot at the same time be the interpreter of experience. All experiences would have been valueless, unless there was already something in existence to profit from experience. Sense impressions are turned into ideas because we are possessed of certain regulative principles. Impressions upon the organs of sense are mere waves of molecular motion. These impressions cannot be identified with consciousness, as Spencer admits, ' What we know as consciousness cannot be identified with waves of molecular motion propagated through nerves and nerve centres ; a unit of feeling has

nothing in common with a unit of motion.'¹

Consciousness, then, neither as a quality of matter, nor the product of experience, is the link between us and God. The finite mind partakes of the nature of the Infinite. There is only one 'substance.' Otherwise the subject 'man' could never know anything of the object 'God.' If man's mind were undivine, nothing divine could he ever recognize. To God we are linked by a bond of life ; rational because he is rational ; moral possibilities because he is Infinite Holiness.

Consequently, we can find no place for the Deistic conception of God. But in dismissing the Deists of old we remember that the break-down, before the attacks of the Rationalists of their age, of the crude supernaturalism wherein religion was enshrined, forced them into their intellectual attitude. For the Deists tried to keep the real essentials of religion by throwing aside superstitions. In the process, however,

¹ Spencer : 'Principles of Biology,' later edition. Quoted by Hector Macpherson : 'A Century of Intellectual Development.'

not having the Immanence of God to fall back upon, they pushed him so far back that for all practical purposes he was lost. God reigned, but governed not ; he worked through secondary agencies. Hence Naturalism came forth, reducing the external world to a big machine, and maintaining that for perfection we need only cultivate and exercise the reason.

The Deists' God was a negligible quantity ; the Naturalists' reason was an Almighty Sufficiency. An adequate religion is possible under neither conception. Religion to be of any worth must mean a vital relationship between God and man.

But, it may be asked, why be particular concerning our knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, God, and of our relationship to him. It would be sufficient to reply that God, the Universe, and Man, are subjects concerning which man has in all times inquired about, and at all times will inquire. But more : we *are* what we believe the Unseen *to be*. Some little time ago I listened in Hyde Park, to the orations of declared Atheists who based all human

misery and backwardness on the existence of authority : i.e., the authority of religion and the State. A twentieth century audience was regaled with the exploded philosophy of the eighteenth century. To confound priestcraft with religion and tyranny with government is a too common thing.

That it is correct to say we are what we believe the Unseen to be, the great materialist Holbach admits in the words 'religious and political errors have changed the universe into a valley of woes.' Carlyle saw the same fact. In his 'Jesuitism' he writes : 'Do you ask why misery abounds among us ? I bid you look into the notion we have formed for ourselves of this universe, and of our duties and destinies there. If it is a true notion we shall strenuously reduce it to practice—for who dare or can contradict his *faith*, whatever it may be, in the Eternal fact that is around him.' And in his 'French Revolution' he writes : 'The Constitution, the Set of Laws, or prescribed Habits of acting, that men will live under, is the one which

images their convictions—their faith as to this wondrous universe, and what rights, duties, capabilities they have there . . .’ And John Morley in his ‘Voltaire’ writes : ‘ If we find ourselves walking amid a generation of cruel and unjust and darkened spirits, we may be assured that it is their beliefs on what they deem the highest that have made them so. There is no counting with certainty on the justice of men who are capable of fashioning and worshipping an unjust divinity, nor on their humanity so long as they incorporate inhuman motives in their most sacred dogmas, nor on their reasonableness while they rigorously decline to accept reason as a test of truth.’

It is, then, of supreme importance to civilization what are our ideas concerning God, the Universe, and Man, i.e., what are our convictions concerning the deepest realities. Therefore it is of moment that we try to know what is the medium, and its value, through which those ideas come to us.

Starting with the fundamental fact, human self-consciousness, we relate it to

Nature as a living whole, and it and Nature to a Supreme Principle of Life manifesting itself through them. We permit no break, no chasm, no mere human self-sufficiency ; no divine impotence offset by supernatural intervention. The human reason finds the whole because, of it, it is a part ; we cling to the authority of the Right because the conscience cannot deny that Infinite Righteousness which is responsible for its being. In other words, religion is the progressive expression through us of the life of God, resulting in a gradual lifting of man above the facts of material existence, and causing us to turn all material forces into qualities of the spirit.

As Browning expresses it in his ' Christmas Eve '—

What is left for us, save, in growth
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,
From the gift looking to the giver,
And from the cistern to the river.
And from the finite to infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity ?

We seek the True because the True is no mere human conception but a divine fact ;

the knowledge that it exists is part of our very nature. No experience has given us this knowledge that there *is* a True; experience simply develops our perception of the Truth. As rational beings we are, in Kepler's words, 'to think God's thoughts after him.' We seek the Right because the Right is not a mere social convention, 'a must developed into an ought,' which, as Dr. Martineau pointed out, is inconceivable and impossible; but because the Right is of the essence of God's Being, in which we share, and it is only by pursuing and obeying it that fulness of life is possible and that men become at one with each other and are made at one with God. The finite man pursues the truth of God and his Righteousness, not under compulsion, but of sheer necessity, since it is his nature, his life, so to do. It is life developing itself. And the development of this life we call religion.

With this note, 'life,' look behind and look ahead. Is it not rational to suppose that that which explains is greater than, and prior to, that which is explained?

The mind of a Spencer that can pursue Matter back and back, until he resolves it into Force, which, as he admits, is more akin to spirit than to matter, is surely greater than that Matter which Tyndall, in 1874, declared contains the 'promise and potency of every form and quality of life.' Surely it is more reasonable to view matter as a phenomenal appearance of Infinite Energy, than Energy as a product of lifeless matter ?

The theory of evolution simply explains a process—the process of how implicit life expresses itself gradually through changing forms on an ascending scale. It cannot even pretend to offer an explanation of origins. And as we gaze upon the panorama, so dazzling, that Science gives us, we see an ascending scale. Nothing is lost but everything is utilized in every process, until the meaning of all the processes stands revealed in self-conscious man. And human intelligence sees that all the processes are controlled by one purpose. Mind has evolved a Kosmos with which mind can converse.

Strewn confusedly everywhere about
The inferior natures, and all lead up higher,
All shape out dimly the superior race,
The heir of hopes too fair to turn out false,
And man appears at last.

That end attained, the method changes.
Man, the end of physical evolutionary
processes, is switched off on to evolutionary
lines that are intellectual and spiritual.
And facing the mysteries of life and death ;
the depths of the heavens without and the
still deeper depths of the soul within, he
sees he is in the grip of an all-mastering
longing—nay, not a longing merely, but a
demand of his rational and spiritual nature
—for some unity in his bed-rock ideas
concerning God, the Universe, and him-
self. He finds, has found, will find no
rest ; heart and mind disturb him and
impel him forward to adjust human facts
to the requirements of one Infinite Right ;
to pluck by a mental effort, feathers from
the wings of the white bird of Truth, that
the Truth may become, not his servant
but his guide ; and to get beneath the
Right and the True, by their means, to
the Infinite God whence they proceed.

And every idea thus gained was, of necessity, conditioned and limited by his receptivity and possibilities ; hence religion, like physical life, has shown itself in lowly forms, but has manifested its truthfulness by its power to adapt itself to, and answer, some need of the heart and mind, carrying man forward step by step ; conquering his natural egoism and becoming the first means of the moral culture of the world.

Now a process that can be reduced to reason, and man is so reducing world processes, can only be or proceed from reason ; and a process that is directed to an end can only be dominated by a purpose. Even as Spencer says : ‘ Human progress is not an accident but a necessity. Instead of civilization being artificial it is a part of nature, all of a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower. The modifications mankind have undergone, and are still undergoing, result from a law underlying the whole organic creation, and . . . these modifications must end in completeness. As surely as the

tree becomes bulky when it stands alone, and slender if one of a group ; as surely as the same creature assumes the different forms of cart-horse and race-horse, according as its habits demand strength or speed ; as surely as a blacksmith's arm grows large, and the skin of a labourer's hand thick ; as surely as the eye tends to become long-sighted in the sailor and short-sighted in the student ; as surely as the blind attain a more delicate sense of touch ; as surely as the clerk acquires rapidity in writing and calculation ; as surely as the musician learns to detect an error of a semi-tone amidst what seems to others a very babel of sounds ; as surely as a passion grows by indulgence, and diminishes when restrained ; as surely as a disregarded conscience becomes inert, and one obeyed active ; as surely as there is any efficacy in educational culture, or any meaning in such terms as habit, custom, practice ; so surely must the human faculties be moulded into complete fitness for the social state ; so surely must the things we call evil and immorality disappear ; so surely must man become perfect.'

Such also is the opinion of Draper, expressed in the last chapter of his work, 'The Intellectual Development of Europe': ' . . . civilization does not proceed in an arbitrary manner or by chance, but . . . passes through a determinate succession of stages, and is a development according to law '—' a control,' he says, ' not inconsistent with free will.'

The Agnostic philosopher is as optimistic as Tennyson or Browning, and though we should deny that the inevitableness he speaks of implies that in the moral world there is the same ' necessity ' as is seen in the natural sphere, yet if he is right in prophesying perfection and the eventual destruction of evil and immorality, the Theist may insist that the intellectual and moral life of man are in the grip of a purpose that has infinite power and absolute moral worth; that the spiritual aspirations of man—proceeding from the very constitution of his nature, inasmuch as he is more than a mere finite being—that cause man to subordinate the present to the future; that find no

satisfaction save in a God all-Powerful and all-Righteous; that demand an infinite reality responding to finite yearning, an infinite voice speaking to a finite hearing; an infinite love yielding consolation to the deep needs of the human heart; that can find no comfort apart from the reality of divine inspiration; that demand a purpose for all the incidents and trials of life, and postulate the fulfilment of that purpose in the great unseen hereafter as the final and full expression of that life which has the reason of its being in the greatness and goodness of God, and its nature in his Nature—these aspirations of man, ranging from the

Shy yearnings of the savage to the utterances of a Christ, are justified by the fact that they are manifestations of that Infinite and Eternal Energy, which Spencer says wells up in us as consciousness.

Such aspirations are in real truth life expressing itself, and therefore have proved themselves of more than priceless value. They have undergone development, but development implies a life that is already

given. It is the end of a process that yields up the key to unlock the mystery.

Religion, that is to say, is a life force. It was implicit in the first man; it is implicit in every man. It has become explicit, just as consciousness has become explicit, through experience. It is the soul seeking the source of its birth—a soul united to God by submission to his will, as that will is apprehended in the search after the True and the Right. It is the 'highest form of man's consciousness of himself in his relation to all other things and beings.' And in that relation he stands because God is the Unity underlying all differences.

MORAL AND PHYSICAL EVIL

THE fact of the existence of evil, moral and physical, is one which, I scarcely need say, has in all ages presented serious difficulties to reflecting minds. But in the present day, the problem it involves is certainly more than ever a subject of keen controversy and warm assertion. Perhaps we should not be wrong if we attributed a large proportion of the estrangement from religious belief now pervading society, especially amongst young men who have just begun to ponder upon such matters, to a sense of the incompatibility of the suffering and wrong around us with the supreme control of an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving Creator. When the pages of history unfold to us a long record of conquest and rapine, of destruction by famine and sword; when we regard the

hard lot of numbers of our fellow-creatures who, even in civilized communities, seem to have small chance of rising above a life of sin and misery ; and when we hear of the sufferings of good men and true, we cannot wonder at the recoil of sensitive natures, and the doubts of inquiring minds. Unobservant for a while of the brighter tints of a true historic picture, and overlooking the numerous but unrecorded simple pleasures of daily life in the humblest conditions, there comes to us the whispered question, ‘ Are we really in the hands of a God whose synonym is Love ? ’

The old dilemma of Epicurus, ‘ Omnipotence could and Benevolence would have prevented evil,’ holds many with a rigid grasp ; and I would deal very gently with those who, unable to see a way of escape from it, find themselves at last in a mood of despairing Atheism. That, however, is a sad, very sad, state to get into. All ground of trust and hope is clean taken away. The outlook is sombre in the extreme, for what is the universe in such a view but a huge relentless machine,

crushing onwards without plan or purpose ? The poetry is gone out of life, and even sympathy with Nature is henceforth impossible. For if the constitution of Nature is such as to exclude the idea of its being the product of benevolent design, how can we gaze upon it with an eye of delight, or look to its unfoldings with hopefulness ? The outward universe becomes a blank, unmeaning aggregate of forces, without any moral quality in which we can enter into relationship, without any beauty which is not upon reflection resolved into mere chemical or mechanical constituents, and without any hint of a Spirit behind the veil to beget confidence and inspire enthusiasm. And in this aspect, what is man himself ? The mere creature of a day, a bubble on the stream of time, an automaton who imagines himself free while he is bound fast in fate, the capricious product of heredity and environment, striving, poor thing, to guide himself by his feeble intellect or tossed for a few brief years on the surging waves of passion, garnering vexation and disappointment,

and then disappearing into the blackness of darkness for ever.

But this is taking too gloomy a view, you say. And so it is. Human nature cannot rest in such conclusions. The divine element in man cannot be so far suppressed as to allow him to remain permanently without some kind of faith in the supremacy of goodness. I only mean to assert that pessimism, or a belief in the predominance of evil, and misanthropy, are the logical outcome of such atheistic thought as rests upon the assumed absence of overruling benevolent design. And such seems to be the later course of speculation in the school of philosophy, which has cast off all religious faith, as evidenced in the writings of Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Heine, Von Hartmann, and others, according to whom consciousness is a misfortune and 'nirvana,' or extinction, the looked-for haven of rest.

Such also is the tendency of the few men of poetic gift who have, for a time, been attracted to English Secularism, as, for instance, the late James Thompson ('B.V.'),

the author of the 'City of the Dreadful Night,' and W. Stewart Ross ('Saladin'), who sings in the *Secular Review*—

There is one steady star, and dim from afar

Comes the solace that lies in its gleam :

There's the coffin nail's rust, the brain in white
dust,

And the sleeping that knows no dream.

Let it be laid down that the Cosmos reveals no guiding spirit of love, that there is no moral meaning in the events of the ages, that desire of pleasure and aversion to pain are the ultimate springs of all human action, that blind force is the sole arbiter of destiny ; and I cannot see how such convictions can be separated from a misanthropic tendency. In our milder moods we might commiserate each other upon our hapless lot ; but when ambition urges, or passion incites, or selfishness persuades one to trample upon weaker fellow-mortals, what is there to stay him ? Take all moral purpose out of Nature, then the survival of the fittest means nothing more than that the strongest get uppermost ; and the sagacious one will say, ' Let me clutch what enjoyment I can during the

transient days of life, for pain is the only evil, and pleasure the only good, and soon I shall be as though I had not been.'

Again, I hasten to acknowledge that to that level men in general, however perverse their theories, cannot sink. If, however, while refusing to accept any form of theological belief, while even rejecting the idea of God, you can look with cheerfulness at the prospects of our race, work with enthusiasm for the good of your fellow-men, and cherish an abiding confidence in evolution as the promise and fulfilment of ever-growing progress, what is there to prevent you from transferring those sentiments of trust and hopefulness to a living, personal God? We hear much about aspiration, and toiling for the welfare of man, and 'the religion of humanity,' from agnostic and secularist teachers. It is pleasant to hear them so speak, and although we do not find them as a class in any way remarkable for practical excellence, the lip-service is often quite sincere, and shows, at any rate, that some faith continues to reside in their hearts. But if they can draw such

inspiration from a soul-less universe and a godless humanity, how much more deeply would they be quickened in all that is aspiring and noble if they could see in the beauty, and order, and progressiveness, which thus attract them, an expression of the Divine Mind ? A world of which one may believe in the ultimate triumph of right, and the sovereignty of goodness, cannot be so far wrong as to preclude a belief in the goodness of its Creator.

And, after all, is it not a poor attempt at escape from the difficulty to say there is no God ? Such an expedient is like putting out one's eyes because open vision sees unpleasant things. Let the enigma of evil remain for ever insoluble by our limited faculties, and the evidence of a Creator remains undiminished. Still the marvellous adaptations and marks of design everywhere observable in nature, the significance of which is in no way obliterated by the modern doctrine of evolution, remain to attest the supremacy of a designing Mind. Still shall we find it impossible, consistently with sound

mental analysis, or a true reading of our own states of consciousness, to disconnect the idea of force or power from Will. We know nothing of power, except as we have experience of it in the exercise of our own will. So with regard to the phenomenal changes of the universe, we have no verifiable idea of causation until we resolve it into the Will of some personal being, and that being we call God.

But the contention is that an almighty and all-good Being would have prevented evil. That is an assumption against which we have a right to protest. It is, in fact, a begging of the question. Let us ask ourselves whether it would have been wiser or better for our Maker to have constituted us without the power of choice, the mere passive recipients of pleasurable sensations? In our innermost conscience do we not know that there is something more worthy of our heart's homage than mere happiness—that nobility of character and the blessedness of a voluntary obedience to the right, although accomplished through struggle and pain, are more

precious than anything that can be measured simply by the scale of enjoyment? We might have been constructed like so much clockwork with such precision of automatic action as always to keep time to a second, and never fail to strike the right hour. It is possible to imagine ourselves turned into highly-organized animals, fed with an uninterrupted supply of the pleasures of sense, secured by invincible necessity in a certain quantity of agreeable new impressions, and shut off from the chance of rising to a higher or sinking to a lower level. But in that case should we be men? Would the transformation be a gain? On the contrary, must we not declare that if turned into creatures to whom such a description would apply we should have sunk immeasurably in the scale of being? Nothing can be more clear than that if we are to have the power of choice, if we are to be free beings and not machines, it must lie within our option to choose the wrong in preference to the right. As moral beings, a moral sphere must be provided, in which the possibility

of evil is a necessary element. Because we ascribe omnipotence to the Creator, it by no means follows that we affirm all sorts of contradictions concerning him. Because, to express our sense of his unfathomable resources, we call him Almighty, we are not precluded from rejecting as absurd such propositions, for instance, as that he can exist and not exist at the same moment of time, or that he could make man free and yet bind him in the chains of necessity. Such propositions are in themselves contradictory, self-destructive, and irrelevant.

Doubters of a benevolent Creator very often argue as if they stood outside of creation. They speak as if they were perched aloft upon some pinnacle not exactly belonging to the world. Fixing their attention upon only the distressing aspects of things, they express much sympathy for suffering creatures, and declare themselves unable to discern the traces of a kindly divine hand. That many such thinkers do feel keenly and do desire to lessen the sum of human misery, far be it from me to deny. It is instinctive of the

human heart to have compassion for pain and seek to alleviate it. But whence come these emotions? How is it that they spring spontaneously in the human breast? Surely it is because we are so made as that tender and loving sentiments should assert themselves with a voice of power within us. Include man, then, in your survey of the works of the Creator, and ask yourself the question, whether it is within the bounds of reason to suppose that he would have implanted in us this sensitive tenderness and yet himself be destitute of it? If the compassionate feelings are so essential an element of the constitution of our race that their ordinary designation is 'humanity,' and if we are all conscious that we ought to yield ourselves to them willingly and actively, we cannot do otherwise than ascribe their origin to the author of our being.

Hence it is in the natural order of experience that the most loving hearts should be most prone to believe in a loving God. What the dry intellect cannot see, the heart, touched with sympathy, often enables us

to discern. Hence doubts of the goodness of God disturb least of all those who are most actively engaged in philanthropic work. The most unwavering trust is with them who have the warmest hearts to feel and the readiest hands to help, who go into the haunts of sin and wretchedness to relieve and to elevate, and who are found like ministering angels at the bedside of the sick or dying. Love to man and love to God seem to have a necessary and intimate connexion. The purest forms of affection flow with an unfailing gravitation towards the boundless ocean of the Supreme Love. That God is Love is an intuition of the affections in their highest development ; but on these grounds the cold intellect also might draw a logical inference of the reasonableness of trust. If we judge of a painter by his pictures, of a poet by his poems, so surely ought we to frame our estimate of the moral attributes of Deity by his reflection in the moral nature of his highest work—Man. Many a simple, unlettered peasant, many a true, warm-hearted woman, who unfalteringly lean on the

divine mercy, and whom you might baffle by argument in a few seconds, are more truly justified by sound philosophy in their trusts than the sceptic is in his alienation and doubt.

In considering the question of the existence of evil, we ought to bear in mind how large a proportion of human suffering springs from the perversity of man himself. Setting aside the mistakes resulting from sheer ignorance, by far the greater amount of evil done on the face of the earth is done in bold defiance or attempted evasion of known moral law. Men know the right, and yet the wrong pursue.

Let each one of my readers candidly consult his memory in some quiet hour, and he will perhaps be startled to find that nearly all the serious sorrows of his life may be traced back to his own sins of neglect or transgression. Some griefs, of course, there are which no human power can prevent, chiefly such as are inflicted by the hand of death when loved ones are taken from us. But in such cases, the soothing influence of religious faith soon lifts the

soul out of its agony, and dowers it with a hope so blessed that henceforth the memory of the departed, instead of being a cause of poignant grief or sullen despair, is a source of joyful anticipation. If the man who fights against God, either intellectually or practically, says that no such assuaging influence comes to him, let him not make that a ground of complaint against the Creator whose healing hand he rejects.

When a breath of the Holy Spirit clears the mind from sophistical mists, and we suspend our accusations against God, or fate, or fortune, how plainly we can see the connexion between what we have done or left undone, and our disappointments, vexations, and sufferings ! Love of ease, self-indulgence, tampering with principle for the sake of worldly profit, putting off to-day's duty until to-morrow, gratification of whims, neglect of the claims of others, giving up the reins to passion, and tampering with sinful enjoyments—all of them being the proceedings of our own will—have brought forth their fruits ; and, as we have sown, so we reap. The seeds of

evil which we ourselves have planted seem often to lie dormant, and we go about cheerily, thinking they are dead and gone, and will never rise to trouble us, when suddenly and unexpectedly they spring up ; the rank growth entangles our feet, and we cannot clear the way until we have gathered the bitter crop. All that I have been describing comes about by the exercise of man's free will. Divest man of this attribute, make him out to be a creature of necessity, a mere sensitive automaton, as materialist theorizers do, then of course the moral aspect of the human lot is changed, and doubtless much for the worse. But when they deny free will, they set themselves against the universal intuitions of mankind, as testified in the language of every race, in all times and everywhere. Deduct then from the ills of life those which, as free agents, we bring upon ourselves, the remainder will, for the most part, be very bearable in the experience of those who give to God a living, loving trust. Pray carry this thought with you, that what appear to be the inevitable

trials and pains of human life are alleviated and minimized, and, indeed, nearly banished, by the spell of religious faith. There is evil, says the doubter ; can God be good ? Trust him, we say, and evil will become a constantly diminishing quantity, and good will grow from more to more. This is a statement of actual fact and experience. Is it not, to the heart, tantamount to a demonstration of the goodness of God ? Was not the psalmist uttering the experience of pure and loving souls in every age when he said, ' God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble ' ?

Just consider for a moment the relation in which we as finite beings must stand to the Infinite. Whatever the bounty of the Almighty towards us it must always be possible to conceive of his having given us more. However high in the scale of being he might have placed us, there would always be a possible higher. So that there is and always must be, in the very fundamental and unalterable nature of things, ample opportunity for the discontented mind to complain of not having some

possession or other more than it has. I have known very wealthy individuals go about, with all the eager anxiety and worry of poverty itself, because they habituated their thoughts to dwell, not on their own good fortune, but upon the larger fortunes of others. Some of these had wrought themselves far on to the miserable condition of slighting the gains they had, because of pining after those they had not. By far the largest proportion of the proclaimed or muttered dissatisfaction with the way in which Providence orders the world comes from this disposition. The spirit of discontent can in heaven itself turn archangels into rebels.

We do admit that when an account reaches us of some dreadful calamity, such as a shipwreck, a railway accident, a mine explosion, in which scores of human beings have been fearfully mangled or suddenly torn away from this world's life, even the most resigned of us can scarcely suppress a querulous demand of 'why does the Almighty allow this?' It is impossible, with any reason or feeling, to make light of such

occurrences or to pretend that they do not present difficulties. But they are just those cases in which faith, and we think a reasonable faith, too, must come to sustain us. If, as we have before argued, *we* pity the suffering, then the God who made us, who put pity into our hearts, must pity them too ; and so we believe in a wise and good purpose, although the end is hidden from us.

The uniformity of the action of natural law is God's pledge of veracity to his creatures. If the laws of nature could not be reckoned upon with certainty, if sometimes they acted in one way and sometimes in another under similar conditions, human endeavour would be paralysed, and life would be without a plan. Yet some people speak as if it would be wise to suspend the law of gravitation when a man falls from a housetop, or to alter the methods of respiration when he sinks in the water, or to nullify the laws of force in the event of a railway collision. Why, in such an uncertain world, everything would be so unsettled that all the motive would

be taken out of human life. To amend the catastrophes which, at any rate, are only exceptional, and which leave unimpaired the ordinary beneficial course of things, we should have a universal catastrophe, and the cure would be one that would kill.

Let us look around and mark the individuals most ready to arraign the dispensations of Providence. Are they, as we might naturally have expected, the most struggling, the most thwarted, the most afflicted of our race? On the contrary, dissatisfaction with life, an inward sceptical mistrust of the presiding power of the universe—not always, perhaps, plainly expressed in words, because that would sometimes be inconvenient—are to be found most frequently where fortune has profusely heaped the means of self-indulgence. Happiness is much more evenly distributed than it seems to be at a superficial glance. The compensations attendant upon what are apparently very unfortunate conditions have often been pointed out by writers who go below the surface. In a true, if not literal, sense,

God *does* 'temper the wind to the shorn lamb.' But, as I was saying, it is very often the case that those who wax fat because of the very abundance of their good things, are just the persons in whom a rebellious disposition most quickly springs up, while children of hardship draw comfort from unexpected sources, and are often the readiest to give thanks. Men and women who have undergone the ordeal of the loss of some of God's most precious gifts are by no means the first to come forward with a railing accusation against his control of events. When they have said, 'The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away,' not a few of them in their hearts add the words of pious resignation, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.'

It was after the loss of sight, and all the fair external world was blotted out for Milton, that he set himself to compose his sublime poem, 'to justify,' as he said, 'the ways of God to man.' Cannot every one call to mind some afflicted one, shut off from all the ordinary sources of even transient pleasure, bearing pain patiently

through months—nay, through long weary years—and sustaining in it all a loving tenderness, a heavenly mindedness, which as the end approached became truly angelic ? Or of some case in which affliction has visited with stunning suddenness members of a family, so that the whole burden of the household has been cast upon the shoulders of one, perhaps an aged mother or a delicate daughter ; and how nobly, how firm of heart, that burden has been borne, and how, when God's sustaining strength has been asked for, that strength has been given, and that home of suffering has manifested the blessedness of self-renunciation ? Take a wider range. Have the great inspirers and benefactors of mankind, the philanthropic heroes and religious teachers of the world, been men whose ways have been so smooth that, heedless of the stern realities of existence, they have been *deluded* into pious trust ? No. Our spiritual and moral leaders, men in whom the light of faith has burned most strongly and steadily, whose never-failing confidence in God is ever our example, are

just those who have endured every form of tribulation, and gone through the fires of martyrdom, clinging to their God, believing in his merciful goodness, and declaring to the last, 'Even though he slay me, still will I trust in him.' Our great exemplar, Jesus himself, was a 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'; but his filial obedience never faltered, and although he would fain have had the last bitter cup pass from him, all was summed up in the words, 'Father, not my will, but thine be done.' The life of the Apostle Paul is also a typical one. 'In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils among his own countrymen, in perils among the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness'; but in all things he was 'more than conqueror,' for he was persuaded that 'neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, could separate

him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.'

Now in all this experience of the highest and best natures of every age, there is surely some indication of truth in which we may with good reason place unhesitating reliance. What our poor, unaided logic could not attain to, these great-souled ones have had a clear vision of. If we are conscious that there is little of the heroic spirit of martyrdom in our own breasts, let us, at any rate, acknowledge our weakness and accept spiritual guidance from those who, knowing most of suffering, have yet had firmest faith in God.

I must in candour allow that, looking at the problem of evil from the standpoint of either the orthodox on the one hand, or of the unbeliever in a future life on the other, it is much more difficult to reconcile with perfect goodness. The former, according to his creed, has to contemplate the eternal misery of an immense number of the human race. As far as they are concerned, at any rate, evil triumphs. God, if he is the All-good, is permanently

thwarted, his sovereignty disputed, his sway limited. In that case, there are embarrassments and contradictions which I could see no way of clearing up. If, on the other hand, the contention of the materialist is valid, that there is no soul in man, that consciousness ceases with the decay of the physical organization, and that the end of man's life here is the end of him altogether, then millions have had in the past, and millions have now, the right to complain bitterly that the Supreme Power, whatever it may be, has been neither generous nor just to them. But let every man, however degraded, be recognized as an immortal being, with infinite possibilities of improvement before him, who, if he sins, shall suffer the just and benevolently contrived punishments which shall, in fulness of time, bend the most stubborn will and soften the hardest hearts, so that ultimately all shall be saved, even if it be as by fire, then the whole outlook upon human destiny presents quite another aspect. Life is, then, not without a meaning. Our present sphere is seen to be a probationary one.

The crosses and trials of which we have complained are the disciplines by which character is perfected, and we are fitted to live in a higher state. Then we can meet trouble manfully, and hold fast to duty ; for we live in hope, and hope can cheer the hardest lot.

Taken in connexion with the doctrine of eternal progressive life for every human soul, the proportion of what we, by the judgment of our limited faculties, have called evil is reduced to a fraction. As against the good that actually now is, and the promise of its future boundless extension, the sufferings of our time-sphere must, according to any accurate standard, be relatively infinitesimal. The ratio is that of the finite to the infinite—the temporal to the eternal. But just as a very small object may shut out from our view an extensive and beautiful landscape, so, fretting over some present little ailment, we may close from our vision the glories of the celestial city. Let us, however, try to see things in their true proportion. We shall find, as we widen our view, that the pro-

blem of evil presents less and less difficulty. May we not fairly conclude that when we no longer see as through a glass darkly, and attain to a clearer and more comprehensive survey, the whole prospect will be bright and beautiful? Faith in immortality can impart patient resignation to the afflicted, inspire the despairing with courage, and send rays of hope into the gloomiest condition. With the assurance of eternal life, the ills of this world dwindle into comparative insignificance, and we can join in Paul's exultant strain:—
'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal: but the things which are not seen are eternal.'

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

GOOD and evil in their extreme phases are as different as light from darkness, and although neat and accurate definitions may not be easy, the words have an understood meaning. A few examples will at once secure assent to this statement and place the subject before us in a tangible form. Food which is gratifying to the taste, satisfying to the appetite, wholesome and sustaining to the body, is a good thing, and it is good to partake of it. It is a good act to provide such food for any of our fellows who need it, and who would otherwise suffer hunger and perish. And generally speaking, we call those things good which promote health, happiness, and security, and those things evil which cause suffering and tend to destruction. To lose

a limb or to become blind, is an evil, because the deprivation lessens the opportunities of usefulness and enjoyment, and increases the difficulty of self-preservation and success. Physical pain is an evil, whether it be hunger, aches and spasms, or the torture of lash or bastinado. Pain that compels us to withdraw the hand from a hot bar which would disorganize the flesh, is beneficial indeed as a monitor, but is evil in the sense of being something unpleasant to experience. Whether we shall call it evil, and say that a small evil is sometimes necessary to secure a greater good ; or whether we shall call it good, because it thus saves us from greater evil, is rather a question of words than of facts.

Among good things may be named the possession of health, the enjoyment of food, pleasure felt in the exercise of our powers and faculties ; genial weather, fruitful soils, plentiful harvests ; reciprocal friendship and the delights of love ; gratification derived from the observation of animals, of Nature's ways and methods, and from making discoveries. Many men, in differ-

ent ages, have gone in quest of the chief good ; but it may be a question what the chief good consists in. Locke says—
' The philosophers of old did in vain inquire whether it consisted in riches, or bodily delights, or virtue, or contemplation. It really consists in those things which produce the greatest pleasure, and the absence of those which cause disturbance and pain : and these are different with different men.'

Among evils as ordinarily understood are bodily defects, as blindness, dumbness, and lameness ; brain defect resulting in epilepsy or lunacy ; difficulties in the way of gratifying our legitimate appetites or exercising our powers and faculties ; pain, disease, and death, and the accidents which cause them. Also severities of climate, barrenness of soil, the destructiveness of flood and fire, the depredations of wild beasts and venomous creatures, the mischiefs which man inflicts on man, and the dispositions which lead to his wrongdoing. We sometimes try to imagine a world in which none of these evils should have place. We perhaps believe that in Paradise, for a

time, they were entirely absent. And when we dwell upon their extent and intensity, they so stir our pity for those who suffer from them, that we wonder why the Creator, if he loves his creatures, should have suffered their introduction.

We start with a belief in God—one God, and his entire goodness. Our difficulty, indeed, arises partly thence; for if the Great Spirit were not a Good Spirit but an Evil Spirit, it might seem fair to suppose that he purposely caused evil; or if there were two Creators, one good and one evil, the mingled yarn of things might appear still better accounted for—at least on a superficial consideration. But Nature tells of only one rule, One Ruler, from the distant star to the human eye that is made to see it, and from the eyes of the Silurian trilobite, and ancient strata pitted with raindrops, to the showers and sunshine of the present day. God is one and there is none beside him. And there is abundant evidence that God is good. The bestowal of life and health on so many creatures is proof enough. We are not made for the

purpose of being tortured, but for various occupation and enjoyment. The world is fair, and through the eye the soul is delighted. Through sunshine, rain, and human labour, God giveth us the kindly fruits of the earth that we may enjoy them. In its main features the earth is suited to be a dwelling-place for man and a theatre for his activities. In details of adaptation he can carve and finish it to his own liking, by making tunnels, building bridges, cutting down jungles, quarrying stone and building houses; as also by mining for coal and making fires, to obtain warmth and cook victuals, and smelt metallic ores, etc. For all such enterprises the requisite power and faculty is bestowed upon man.

Through the love of offspring, which is made instinctive in all animals, the unfledged bird finds itself in a warm nest, and all young creatures are protected and provided for until able to look after themselves. It has been shown by Darwin that whatever organ or structure, instrument or weapon, instinct or sensibility, an animal is provided with, it is for the

individual's own good, always for its advantage. Thus we see that God is good. Evil things do exist, using the term 'evil' in its popular sense ; but the sum of the matter is that good preponderates over evil. There is more enjoyment than suffering, and almost every creature is so far satisfied with its existence that it is wishful to continue in life, or at least has no desire to die. Archbishop King, who wrote an 'Essay on the Origin of Evil,' maintained that if there were not this preponderance of good over evil the world would not last ; by which he meant that evil forces have a disintegrating power and would ruin the structure if they were not more than counter-balanced. The *purpose* of the Creator is good ; his design is to bestow good upon the creature ; whereas suffering, when it comes, appears to be accidental or incidental, not deliberately arranged for, but finding its way in. As Paley says, teeth may ache sometimes, but they were made to eat with and not for the purpose of giving pain.

We may say, indeed, that most of the

things which we call good, have the appearance of having been contrived, invented, or arranged, for the useful or pleasure-giving purpose which they serve, whereas the things we call evil seem to be incidents and accidents, like good machinery out of gear, instruments turned aside to a wrong use, shadows incident to the presence of the substance, or mere natural crudeness of unmoulded material. In short, the good is designed and formed, while the 'evil' is what still remains unmoulded like raw material which has the makings of good in it, but awaits the worker. Chaos or crudeness is the natural state of things; and what really requires to be accounted for is the good that has been fashioned out of the indifferent material, the sweet fruit that has been grafted upon the wild stock. If upon landing on some unknown shore we should observe the ground marshy or stony, or a wilderness of weeds, we should not be surprised, but rather regard it as the natural condition of things. If, shortly afterwards, as we walked into the interior, we beheld a beautiful sight—a plot of ground laid out

as a garden, with cultivated flowers, healthy shrubs, fruit-laden trees, the paths neatly kept, the beds well-watered—it would be the garden that would require accounting for, and not the weeds remaining in it, or the barren waste outside.

Yet it may seem as though the earthquake, the lightning stroke, pestilence, blindness, poverty, etc., are positive evils; that some evils are not the mere negation of good, but are part of the warp and woof of things, woven into the fabric. If that be so, our perplexity is not yet removed, and we still ask why evil was allowed to find its way in.

It does sometimes seem as though we must say, that God is not Almighty, or else that he is not all-Good. One writer says, 'If he is good he must desire our happiness, if infinitely powerful he must be able to effect it,' and yet we are not happy. (H. W. Lovett, 'Thoughts on the Cause of Evil.') The dilemma had long ago been formulated by Epicurus, as an objection against Providence: 'Either God is willing to remove evils and not able, or able and

not willing, or neither able nor willing ; for if he be both able and willing, whence come they ? ' The same dilemma has perplexed philosophers in different ages. Bayle, a man of prodigious research, and well acquainted with all the attempted solutions, declares that ' the manner of reconciling the moral and physical evils of man with all the attributes of one infinitely perfect principle of all things, is an inconceivable mystery.' John Stuart Mill, whose writings are more recent, discusses the difficulty in his *Essay on Theism*, and asserts that God is not omnipotent. But he means by this that the Creator works out his purposes by using matter and force, and is necessarily limited by their nature and properties, which cannot be altered. There is reason to believe that the difficulty thus felt by philosophers is shared by many thoughtful persons in all grades of society.

We have to recognize what is known and spoken of as the nature of things. The life of man in the world makes him familiar with matter and space, however little he

may comprehend their true nature. All our occupations involve some change to be produced in the form or place of materials, or (in the case of teaching and argument) in the condition of other people's minds. Suppose that a potter is going to fashion clay into a tea-cup, the material at once limits him and affords him his opportunity. It is clay that he must have and not sand, and the clay must be of a certain plasticity ; and the beauty of it, after it has passed the furnace, will depend upon the fineness of its quality. So he is limited by his material, without which, nevertheless, he can do nothing. It may be that from lack of skill he is unable to give the article an elegant form, or that through momentary carelessness he mars the shape, and then he is limited in himself. Possibly in the furnace, to which scores of vessels are submitted together, some want of uniformity in the heat proves bad for some individual specimen, and thus is he hampered or balked by conditions. Then we must allow, that of his own choice, and in the exercise of his right, he may make

vessels for the tea-table and vessels for the scullery : and he could not properly furnish a house if he made all vessels alike. Further, in his work there must be a beginning and several stages of progress, as well as an end : and so time is an element to be taken into account. The clay must be soft in order to be moulded : and yet that stage must be passed, and the clay must be baked hard before it can fulfil its use. The deftest moulding requires a little time, and the stages of annealing cannot safely be hurried.

Bearing in mind what has been said of the naturally inchoate condition of matter and the need for some worker to mould it before any purpose can appear, we must regard what is unformed as neither good nor evil, but raw material possessing latent capabilities, which the operator may turn to good account or bad. Chaotic worlds, not yet fit for habitation, belong to this indifferent class ; and so do marshes that are undrained, and torrents unbridged and unused, and iron ores not yet smelted for the useful metal.

The element of time comes in, as much in the creation of a world and the development of life as in the building of a bakery and the spread of the leaven through the dough. The sapling comes before the oak, the flower must precede the fruit, the child be before the man, ignorance before knowledge, barbarism before civilization. Barbarism, human error, and a child's mistakes, may be compared with sour fruits; and we may call them evil; but they are rather good things whose growth is immature. We should not fail to notice that there is growth and progress.

In judging of works in progress—whether an artist's picture, an architect's palace, or the works of Deity—we must beware not to condemn as evil the things themselves in their earlier stages. The finished picture or structure can alone show the worker's full intention. The world we live in is full of unfinished things, and works in course of development—for example, sour fruit, the eye of a fish (inferior to the eye of man), the mind of a child, the spiritual nature of man, the social develop-

ment of communities. It would be a kindred error to blame the Creator because the relics of earlier stages are not immediately cleared away ; to complain of the existence of things which only linger as survivals of an earlier world, things which were good in their time, and have only ceased to be so because things around them are changed. An antiquated custom, a law made for a different condition of society, a street too narrow for the increased traffic, a tight jacket on a growing boy, a creed which advancing knowledge contradicts, are lingering evils of this class. And so, perhaps, are earthquakes in the natural world, and selfishness in man.

A large class of evils, so called, appear to be attached to good things and good arrangements like an unavoidable shadow ; or to be incidental to the design, like explosiveness to a steam-boiler. The teeth are well contrived for mastication, but they may ache. The purpose is effected, but there is some accompaniment which is not desirable. Every labour of man has its inconvenience, every enterprise its draw-

back. In filing steel we may get the dust into our lungs. In making dogs our companions we incur the risk of bites. The bricklayer may fall from a ladder, the fisherman perish in a squall. In making a Severn tunnel some springs in the district are caused to run dry. In such a great work as the Forth Bridge it is certain beforehand that some accidents will occur. Yet for the sake of the great advantage we accept the small risk, put up with the trifling percentage of evil. We would rather use fire, with risk of conflagration, than be without warmth, and have to eat raw food, and dispense with all the articles manufactured from metals through the agency of heat. We choose to have the useful compounds which are supplied by practical chemistry, although the processes leave an encumbrance of waste products on our hands. The inconveniences are a small price to pay for the good things to which they are attached.

In the Divine operations there may perhaps be the like kind of incidental evil, if evil it is to be called—a necessary con-

comitant of the greater good. It is not absolutely necessary to have it, because the good thing of which it is the shadow may be dispensed with altogether. But it is a question of both or neither. The student of astronomy knows how simple is the arrangement which gives us summer and winter in their time : the earth's axis is inclined to the ecliptic plane, and remains parallel to itself all round the orbit. Suppose now that there is some good reason for assigning the earth its present path, and the moon her actual orbit too ; then it follows that there will be several eclipses every year, although the chill to the earth may be undesirable, and the darkness and dread be an evil to the mind of man.

In like manner earthquakes, storms, deluges, and inundations, depend on natural causes which are necessary, and could not be removed without greater damage to the whole. In storms the electric tension rights itself, and in the process the air is perhaps purified from insect pests.

Another instance of conditional necessity may be found in our own frame. Bodies

of flesh and blood are really admirable creations, and probably no other kind of body would suit the needs of the human spirit, which has commerce with the material things of this world. But such a body is liable to injury from fire, frost, poison, or blade of steel : and this, perhaps, could not be avoided. Provision is indeed made to guard against these risks, by endowing the body with a sensitiveness to pain which extends to every part ; but pain is an evil in itself. We allow that it is a watchful sentinel, alert against all aggressors ; warning us to remove the hand from the hot bar, to protect the neck from the frosty air, avoid any deeper cut of the knife, take no more of the food or poison that causes sickness. It is a small evil compared to the damage and destruction it saves us from, and it is better to have the capacity of pain than find our feet burnt off in a quarter of an hour of inadvertence ; still it must be regarded in the light of insurance price that has to be paid, through the fact that conditional necessity attends even the work of the Creator.

Hunger and thirst are as necessary as pain. Indeed they are a species of pain, though not recognized as such unless they become intense ; but they serve the useful purpose of urging us to take food, without which the body would not be sustained. The labour required in order to obtain food ensures exercise to the limbs, and is no evil except when carried on to excess, or under unhealthy conditions. The spur of hunger, want, or desire, is the prompter of effort, and gives the mandate for carrying on industry and building up civilization.

It may seem unfortunate that the struggle for existence and supremacy should have been continued between the families of men ; that wars should desolate the earth and tribes be slaughtered out. But the same considerations apply here as on the lower plane of brute life and struggle. In the first place the fittest survive, and by the accumulation of useful variations savagery is at length displaced by civilization and refinement. Secondly, it must be borne in mind that no inferior race has disappeared without having had

its day of enjoyment, nor engaged in warfare without delighting in the battle. Yet, while the good effect of wars in the past may be acknowledged (and thus the providence of God vindicated), it should now be recognized and taught that the time has come when war ought to cease. It is an evil now : it does more harm than good in the present stage of civilization. It selects the strong and healthy for destruction ; its taxes are a burden on industry ; its operations paralyse commerce, and its cruel spirit hinders the realization of human brotherhood.

The struggle for existence involves death as a matter of course ; and death in the case of man is regarded as the greatest evil of all. But bodies of flesh and blood are naturally mortal—not merely liable to be killed, but certain to die, if only from senile decay. Death is one of those things which could not have been prevented. The choice was, either to create mortal bodies or none at all ; and they were created, we may suppose, because their life, though brief, is a boon. And if after this life,

which may be regarded as educative, our spirits are to be advanced to a higher state of existence, death is no more an evil than birth.

Perhaps the *fear* of death is an evil, because 'fear hath torment'; but some degree of shrinking from death is required in order to induce us to avoid dangers and preserve our life, on the same principle that pain is needed as a sentinel.

We can perhaps reconcile ourselves more easily to death as a result of age and decay than to death which overtakes people prematurely from accident or disease. Mining disasters and shipwrecks take away the young and strong by the score, epidemics sweep thousands into the grave, and teething and measles carry off infants. Grief afflicts the survivors, and in many families the loss of the bread-winner heralds poverty; so that, on the face of things, Providence seems to be unsympathetic and harsh. But are we sure that accidents could be prevented? In some cases, no doubt they could, and after a railway disaster a jury can very often fix the blame :

but the question is whether from the standpoint of the Providence which is educating man, all accidents could be avoided ? They arise from negligence, inadvertence, overconfidence, errors of judgment ; yes, but these are defects of human nature in its present half-disciplined stage and condition. The nature of man cannot be perfected in a year or an age, any more than fruit can grow and ripen in a day.

Similar considerations apply to disease, and the means of prevention or of cure. A better knowledge of the laws of health, coupled with the necessary care in observing them, might give immunity from all maladies. A thorough acquaintance with remedies, with shrewdness and promptitude in applying them, might cure the frame which any disease had affected. But we have not yet arrived at that perfection : time, discipline, and experience have not been sufficient.

The explanation of moral evil is more difficult than that of physical evil ; and yet the existence of the one may lessen our surprise at the presence of the other.

If plagues or earthquakes break not heaven's
design,

Why then a Borgia or a Catiline ?

The arguments which go to show the inevitable occurrence of natural evil may also show, we suspect, that moral evil could not have been prevented. The same kind of conditional necessity may extend through all departments. Perhaps, also, the same general clues may lead us toward the light.

First, there was the alternative before the Creator—to create man or not to create him ; and as his wisdom decided that it was better to create, we may deduce the conclusion that ultimately no son of man will have to say it had been better for him if he had not been born. Next, there could not be more Gods than one—the Almighty could not create another Almighty—and it seems to follow that no created being could be absolutely perfect in any quality whatever. The creatures must also differ, some from others, if the world is to be a system, or if society is to be an organism ; just as, in the body, there must be ‘ uncomely parts ’ as necessary as the rest.

Another alternative in creating man was either to bestow free will or to withhold it. But a little consideration will show that a creature who was not free would be an automaton, his obedience (if he obeyed) no more virtuous than the movements of a clock ; his errors (if he committed any) no more his fault than a clock's striking the wrong hour. St. Basil says that God wishes to be served voluntarily ; and we may perhaps add that only thus can he be served, for the obedience of a machine is but a figure of speech. Now free agents, of course, have a will of their own, a power of choice, and may either obey or disobey ; so that some one defined free will as ' the privilege of sinning.'

It is only because men possess free will that we praise their conduct, or blame them, and hold them responsible. We do not blame the breakers or the wind, nor a horse for becoming lame, nor a child for being born blind. We do not blame a watch for being wrong, nor imagine that close confinement for fourteen days would alter its disposition. But we do blame

cruel and dishonest men, robbers, and assassins. We blame them, because we believe they had power to act better and would not. If human creatures had no power of choice, but were constrained to move in a groove like electric tram-cars, or go like clocks and watches, the evil they did would be natural evil and not moral. Adulteries, thefts, and perjuries, then, would be reduced to the same class as aches and accidents; and murder would only be blind force in the actor, natural death to the victim.

What kind of actions do we blame, and why do we blame them? We blame lying, deception, fraud, false witness, theft, adultery, violence, murder—all of which are forms of selfishness—and we bring into the same category coveting, envy, anger, hatred, etc., because they are among the dispositions and passions which lead to the wrong acts. These examples are sufficient, and we observe concerning them that they are all dispositions and actions which tend to the injury or discomfort of our fellows. The acts are *morally* bad because they inflict *natural* evil. To obtain pleasure

for ourselves we inflict pain and cause misery ; for our own enrichment we make our brother poorer. Nearly all our wrongdoing is resolvable into selfishness. But shortly it may be put thus, that it is inflicting upon our neighbour some pain, or loss, or inconvenience which, if it occurred to ourselves, we should call 'evil.'

It may be observed also that evil may be judged not only from the point of view of the individual, but from the standpoint of society. In both cases it is what causes discomfort or tends to destruction—theft and violence, for instance, disturb security—and society will of course blame and punish the deeds which threaten it with disintegration.

As we blame others who purposely do evil to us, so we cannot but anticipate their blame if we do evil to them. In this there is, perhaps, the beginning of a sense of shame and disgrace. We rise also to a sense that what is really blameworthy, the Creator himself must blame ; and our sense of guilt in his sight is the consciousness of sin.

Sin is sometimes defined as that which displeases God, or as doing what he forbids and neglecting that which he enjoins. There is perhaps not much inaccuracy in the definition, if we understand that God's will or pleasure is nothing arbitrary or capricious, but that he disapproves things on the same principle that man does, namely, that they tend to discomfort and disintegration. As King remarks, 'the Divine laws are chiefly declarations of the natural and necessary effects of sin, or directions and means to avoid them; which necessary effects are conceived to be the real *sanction* of these laws.' The laws are apt to run in the form 'Thou shalt not steal,' 'Thou shalt do no murder,' or in the form, 'Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.' They may all be summed up in a sentence: 'Love God with all thy heart, and love thy neighbour as thyself.'

It is not difficult to know God's will when it runs in the course dictated by our own instinct and experience. When a mother is resistlessly drawn by natural

feeling to nurse her babe, she learns her duty in that way, as clearly as though the voice of an angel gave command. In later stages of the child's life, the duties of the parents are suggested by the needs of the little one, and the relation in which they stand to it. The child, on its part, as it comes to years of understanding, may know from its filial relation, that it should 'obey its parents,' 'honour its father and mother.' Two brothers standing side by side, and perceiving that they are constituted alike, must know that they have the same natural rights, that they stand on an equal footing before God, and that they ought each to do as they would be done by. By a consideration of our nature, our circumstances, and our relations to one another, we may learn our duty; and when we know our duty we know God's will.

There is one department, however, in which it is possible to sin against God without injuring our brother, and that is when we abuse our own health, waste our time and powers, or shorten our life. Idleness, drunkenness, and gluttony are harm-

ful to ourselves, the immediate gratification being purchased at the cost of later loss and suffering to our fortunes or our frame. It is conceivable that these vices, and even the act of suicide, might be indulged in without harm to our brother; and yet because the will of the Creator, sufficiently known to us, was defied or disregarded, there would be sin, and we must blame ourselves.

In common phraseology people fall into sin because they are tempted. There is some attraction, enticement, or impulse to do wrong, which requires an effort to resist. The inducement may be to drink too much wine, or indulge some other present taste or propensity, although a penalty will have to be paid later. Or it may be to gratify our own desires at the expense of our brother. The danger of yielding consists in the present offer, the immediate appeal of the wine, while the distant gout is but dimly realized; in the strength of our desire for our brother's gold or garment, or ox or ass or wife, and the comparative coldness of our sympathy, and comparative

weakness of our regard for blame and shame. But the realization of results is only possible to reflective minds, while the mind of man was not at first reflective, and could not very well become so until after some length of experience. It takes time for human nature to grow perfect; it is not in the first instance wise, just, generous, amiable, ripe, and sweet.

In the children of the vicious we sometimes observe an hereditary disposition to do evil. Something of this inborn tendency exists in all of us, and is what is spoken of by theologians as natural depravity derived from our first parents. The doctrine of evolution, also, carries us back beyond our immediate parentage in search of the source. Civilized man is descended from the savage, and savage man from a less human original. In our veins there runs mingled the blood of all our ancestors, backward to 'Adam and Eve,' and of a still larger number of lowlier progenitors preceding. To this cause and source may be traced much of our propensity to ferocity and cruelty, theft and cunning,

lust and selfishness, and a general disregard to any other right but might. These dispositions existed in our far-off brutish progenitors ; they were necessary in them, to enable them, or to induce them, to take hold on life ; they were bound to precede the development of what was human and humane, and though diluted and diminished, they still come to us by inheritance.

To some minds this account of things may cause perplexity ; and suggest the idea that, if these propensities are natural instincts, they are not our fault, and we shall not be wrong in yielding to them. How is it then that we come to condemn them ? Our experience is really like that of the Apostle Paul, who found two natures within himself, each governed by its own rule or law, and these laws in antagonism with one another. When strict virtue and easy indulgence are simultaneously presented to his choice, he finds that his mind approves the higher course, but his appetites and passions induce him to follow the lower. His admiration for righteousness, purity, and unselfishness has been called

into vigorous exercise by Christ, but at the same time there are undercurrents and deep stirrings of his nature which hurry him into evil. Paul's belief was that the evil propensities were inherent in the flesh, born with him, inherited from Adam, and in their original caused by Satan. It is remarkable that Evolution should also teach that they come to us by inheritance, and that, as Emerson has said, a man cannot escape from his ancestors.

And yet, surely, in one way we *can* escape. The providence of God sets higher things before us continually, and urges us to reach forth after them. We are so constituted that we cannot withhold our admiration from what is pure and excellent, and cannot but blame ourselves if we choose to cleave to what is filthy and base. We are placed under a law of progress which we have no right to resist, because it is a part of our present nature and expresses for us the divine will. We ought to be advancing towards perfection, leaving the things that are behind. Brutality was proper to brutes, and cunning was a means

of defence against the strong, and selfishness was needed if there was to be self-preservation: but the time came when human nature was to 'let the ape and tiger die' out of it, and walk erect.

The wonderful complexity of human nature is explained by the long line of forefathers and predecessors, in whose image and after whose likeness our nature is made and born. What we inherit from our most remote progenitors, who were low down in the scale of being, is deep down in our nature, and tends to dwindle and die out. What we inherit from our more recent ancestors, whose qualities were higher, is usually superior, and asserts itself as having more right to prevail. Between these two the battle is sometimes fierce: but Evolution and the God of Evolution will ensure eventual victory to the 'law of the mind.' We are not at liberty then to regard all parts of our nature as of equal authority—the higher and the lower, the brutal and the civilized, the vicious and the refined. If God had created the whole nature and constitution of man

at a single effort, instantaneously, we might fairly suppose that every part of it was good, and deserved to be retained, encouraged, and followed. But when we see that he has been elaborating man's constitution for long ages, having a purpose in view, namely, to perfect it, it is clear that the earlier stage may be likened to the block of marble when it first comes under the sculptor's hands. God's later work in human nature shows the nearer accomplishment of his will ; and for us to give preference and encouragement to the earlier and lower is contrary to his will. It is resistance to the divine law which urges us forward ; it is contempt of the hand of God who beckons us onward ; it is a fighting against God, and is felt to be such. This feeling is our sense of sin. Thus all difficulty is cleared up in our understanding of this matter. The evil in our members is a survival from lowlier states of being, as suggested by the doctrine of Evolution ; but it is sin too, when we yield to it, as taught in the doctrine of Paul.

THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE DATED

WHEN were the various Books of the Bible first written ? It must frankly be admitted that it is impossible to give an accurate or completely satisfactory answer to this question. No one really knows when or by whom some portions of the Bible were written.

The earliest existing Hebrew manuscript of the Old Testament only carries us back to the year 916 A.D., although there exists a Greek version older than the time of Jesus. The Hebrew MSS of the Old Testament are copies of the Massoretic Text ' (5th to 8th century A.D.). The ' Samaritan ' version of the Pentateuch in Hebrew was written about the year 333 B.C. The ' Septuagint ' version in Greek of the Books of the Law belongs to the year 280 B.C., or thereabout ; the other portions of the ' Septuagint ' from the middle of the third century B.C. to the time of Jesus. What is called the

'Canon' of the Old Testament, that is the list of books as we now have it, was not settled until somewhere between the end of the second century B.C. and 100 A.D. Several valuable books were excluded from the 'Canon,' and some less important ones included.

Of the New Testament, the Greek MSS range in date from the fourth century until the invention of printing in the middle of the fifteenth century. Some papyrus fragments from Oxyrhynchus are assigned to the middle of the third century A.D. There are Versions in Latin, Syriac, and Coptic, made from the Greek, dating from the end of the second century. The most ancient MS in this country is at the British Museum (*Codex Alexandrinus*), and belongs to the fifth century. There is an older MS at Rome, and another at St. Petersburg. The 'Canon' of the New Testament took shape about the year 200 A.D. Certain books were accepted, others excluded, and a few were considered of doubtful authenticity.

The 'authorized' English version of the Bible was published in 1611; the 'revised'

version of the New Testament was issued in 1881; and the 'revised' Old Testament in 1885.

How do modern scholars who simply seek to know and speak the truth, without ecclesiastical or theological bias, date the books of the Bible? Scholars are not all in agreement respecting the dates of some books and parts of books. 'Evidence,' in the strict sense of the term, is often very imperfect, and sometimes lacking altogether; so 'inference' necessarily plays an important part in arriving at conclusions.

The dates given here may be taken as fairly representative of the views held by the liberal and progressive school of Biblical scholars who accept what is called the 'Higher Criticism.'

There is a convenience in beginning with the year 1000 B.C., and ending with the year 150 A.D. The whole of the literature contained in the Old and the New Testament, as well as in the Apocrypha, may be said to have been produced between these two dates. The beginnings of Hebrew literature consisted of legends

and folk-songs which were orally repeated or recited, and passed on from parents to children. Hero-songs and stories, annals of the tribes, records of ceremonial rites, primitive codes or rules of conduct, followed in due course. The bondage in and escape from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, the conflicts and consolidation of the tribes, along with traditions concerning Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Saul, David, and other personalities, provided plenty of incident for literary treatment. Moses flourished about 1300 B.C.; David about three hundred years later. Then came Solomon; afterwards the division of the kingdom into two—'Israel,' and 'Judah.' Elijah and Elisha, two fiery prophets, preceded the great literary epoch of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah.

The Old Testament is made up of writings covering about eight hundred years, and representative of the varied life and religion of the Hebrew people during that long period. The evolution of religion may be historically traced from crude to noble forms of faith.

OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE

The following table of dates will give readers a modern historical and critical synopsis of Old Testament literature. The dates are of course only approximate.

B. C.

- 850-800 ' J ' Parts of Pentateuch ; Kings.
- 800-750 ' E ' Parts of Pentateuch ; Kings.
- 750-725 Amos, Hosea, Micah (i-iii).
- 740-700 Isaiah (i-xxxiv).
- 700-650 Earlier Psalms ; Micah (iv-vii).
- 660-625 Deuteronomy (' D ').
- 650-625 ' J ' and ' E ' blended in Pentateuch.
- 630-620 Nahum and Zephaniah.
- 625-580 Jeremiah ; Habakkuk.
- 620-610 Earlier Proverbs (x-xxii).
- 590-570 Ezekiel.
- 580-550 Obadiah ; Lamentations.
- 560-520 Judges, Samuel, Kings (revised).
- 560-520 Isaiah (xl-lv) ; ' JED ' blended.
- 520-450 Haggai and Zechariah (i-viii) ; Malachi.
- 520-450 ' P ' parts of Pentateuch ; more Psalms.
- 450-400 Isaiah (lvi-lxvi) ; Ruth.
- 400-350 ' JEDP ' blended : the Hexateuch.
- 400-350 Job ; Psalms (collection made) ; Joel.
- 340-300 Isaiah (xxiv-xxvi) ; Zechariah (ix-xiv).
- 340-300 Proverbs ; more Psalms ; Jonah.
- 300-250 Chronicles—Ezra—Nehemiah.
- 250-200 Song of Solomon ; Ecclesiastes ; Proverbs.
- 200-150 Esther ; Daniel ; Psalms completed.

The letters 'J,' 'E,' 'D,' 'P,' are used by scholars to indicate portions of the Hexateuch (the first six books) belonging to different periods and writers. 'J'—the writings in which 'Jahveh' is used to describe God; 'E'—in which 'Elohim' is used; 'D' the writer of Deuteronomy; 'P'—the Priestly writings. The well-known Old Testament stories belong to 'J' or 'E'; laws and regulations concerning life and worship belong to 'P'; 'D,' the Deuteronomist, stands more or less by itself.

The Old Testament Books may also be arranged thus: (1) *Ancestral Tradition and Law*—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; (2) *National Tradition and History*—Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah; (3) *Prophecy*—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; (4) *Poetry, Reflection, and Romance*—Psalms, Lamentations, Song of Solomon, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Jonah, Ruth, Esther, Daniel.

NEW TESTAMENT LITERATURE

The period covered by the writings of the New Testament is of much shorter duration—about one hundred years. With the exception of certain letters bearing the name of Paul, the authors of the books are unknown. The Gospels, especially the first three, are the work of writers who probably had at their service earlier records of the sayings and doings of Jesus, as well as oral traditions.

The following dates are only approximate. Certainty is not attainable.

A.D.

50-55 Galatians ; I, II Thessalonians.

55-60 I, II Corinthians ; Romans.

60-65 Philemon ; Philipians.

70-80 Gospel of Mark ; Hebrews ; I Peter.

80-85 Gospel of Matthew ; James ; Jude.

85-90 Gospel of Luke ; Acts.

90-95 Revelation ; I, II, III John.

95-100 Colossians ; Ephesians ; I, II Timothy.

100-150 Gospel of John ; Titus ; II Peter.

The careful reader will discover that although the range of religious ideas in the New Testament concerning God, man, duty, immortality, is much more limited than in the Old Testament,

there is considerable diversity of view among the writers. It may be said, for example, that there are at least three presentations of the life and teachings of Jesus: (1) that contained in the first three Gospels; (2) that of the Epistles of Paul; (3) that of the Gospel which bears the name of John.

The important place which the Bible has held and still holds in the thought and affections of the civilized world demands that its study should be undertaken with intellectual seriousness. The highest honour we can render the Bible is to study it with open and enlightened minds, and with the single desire to learn the truth about its history and interpretation. The 'Higher Criticism,' by enabling us to re-arrange the books of the Bible in what was probably their historical order, has made it easier for us to understand the rise and development of the religion of the Hebrews; and the origin and growth of Christianity.

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